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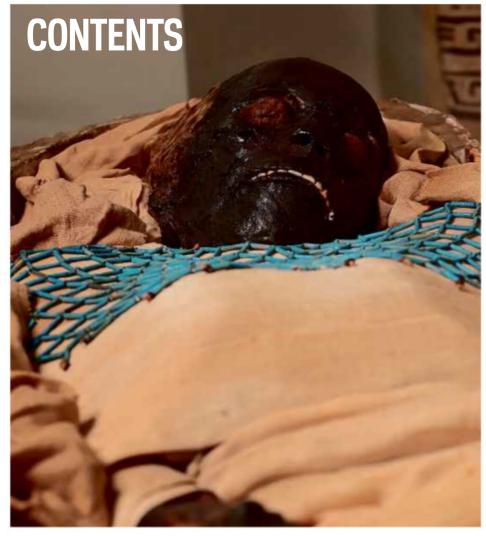
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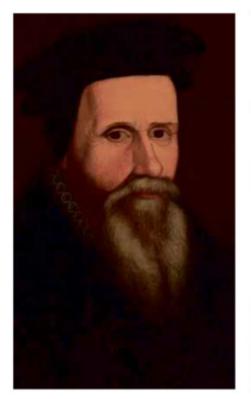






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UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER



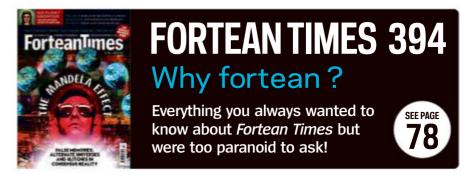
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# **EDITORIAL**



YOU MUST REMEMBER THIS...

Our theme in this issue is memory, an aspect of human experience that we know can play a major part in fortean subject areas: just think of topics such as witness reliability, false memories, supposedly 'recovered' memories that emerge under hypnosis or the memories people have of what appear to be past lives.

A relatively new memory-related phenomenon that has emerged in recent years has come to be called 'The Mandela Effect': the widespread misremembering of often trivial elements of popular culture (Was the KitKat previously the Kit-Kat?) or recent history (didn't Nelson Mandela die in prison in the 1980s?)

What could be behind these widely shared (especially in the Internet age) false memories? Suggestions include incursions from the multiverse, interfering time travellers and the efforts of CERN to find the 'God particle'. Brian J Robb explores all this and more in his cover feature (p.32). Mark Greener (p.40), approaches the subject from a somewhat different perspective, and suggests that many such anomalies – from false memories to false confessions – can stem from the normal (if not always reliable) functions of human memory; what's more, the potential glitches in its evidently mutable workings can potentially be exploited, for good or ill: mind control, or at least memory control, is chillingly possible.

Paul Sieveking, meanwhile, exercises his own prodigious powers of recall to take us back to the 1990s, offering a nostalgic selection of classic FT news stories from the decade: so, you can relive the joys of milkdrinking Hindu statues, the bees who paid their last respects to a beekeeper and the unsolved mystery of a dead Tamil Tiger in a Torquay hotel – turn to p.46.

#### LOCKDOWN COMFORTS, BELGIAN STYLE

We were pleased to hear, via Facebook, from Belgian FT reader Stijn Meuris Privé, who shared with us an article he had written for the Flemish national newspaper De Morgen (pictured above) as part of a series about people seeking cultural comforts while living under coronavirus lockdown. The article is in Dutch (our own Theo Paijmans would be the ideal translator), but Stijn tells us that in English, the title would be: "Every month the holy grail for 15,000 nerds". Perhaps now the assembled nerds (or is that geeks?) of Belgium will realise what they've been missing all these years.



#### **GETTING COPIES OF FT**

We know that it hasn't been easy getting hold of FT as a result of lockdown restrictions on travel and shopping. Taking out a subscription is the best way to guarantee your regular FT fix, and if you are able to support us in this way, then turn to p.60 for the latest offers. This month, with the re-opening of non-essential shops, including many branches of WH Smith, it should become easier to buy FT from your usual stockist. If you are still experiencing difficulties, or cannot leave the house, then copies for home delivery, including recent issues you might have missed, can be ordered here: https://magsdirect.co.uk/ magazine-category/entertainment/fortean/. Digital subscriptions and single issues are also available from zinio.com.

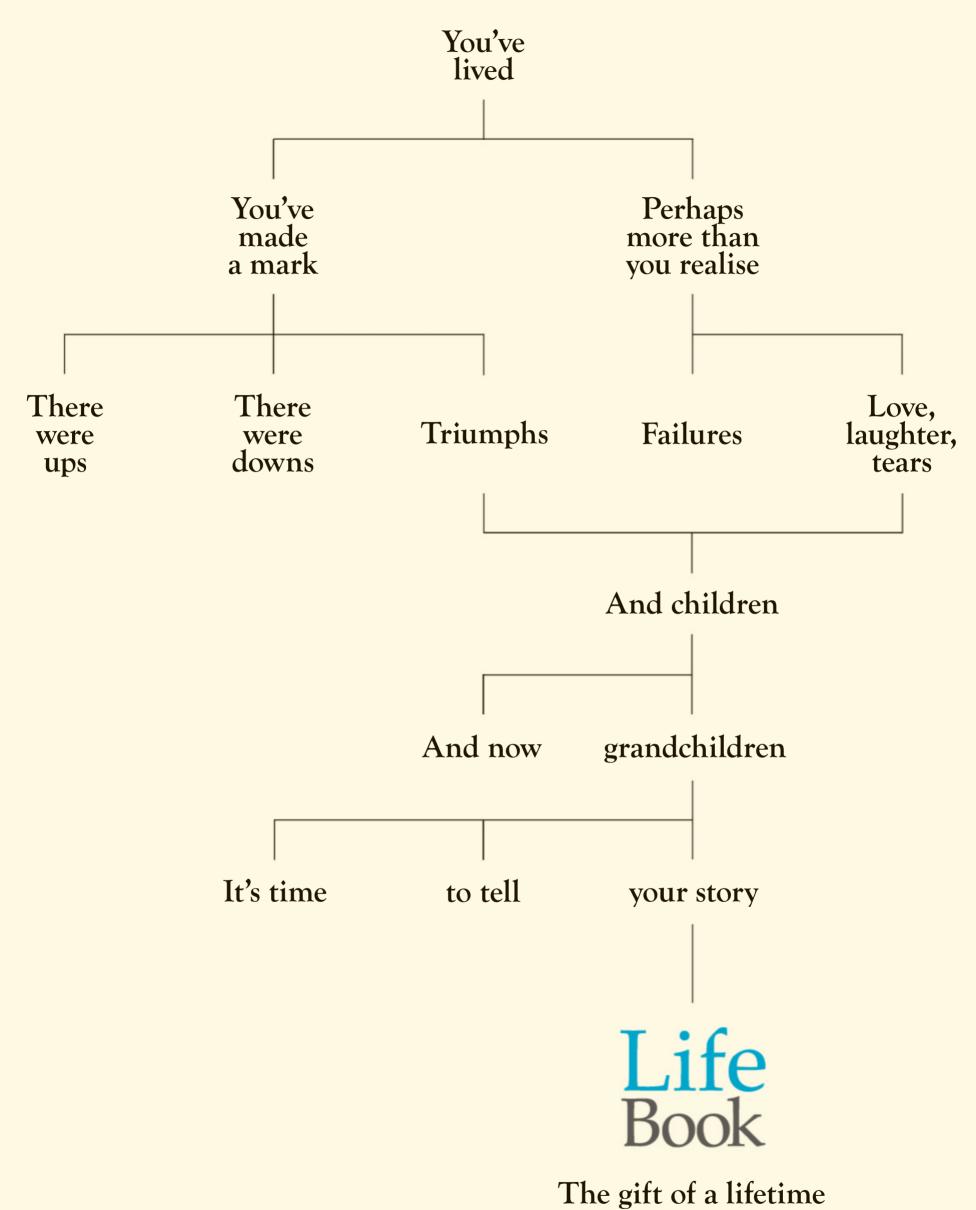
#### **ERRATA**

FT389:45: Marinus van der Sluijs of Vancouver noted that in 'Building a Fortean Library', "a line of latitude" should have been "a line of longitude".

FT391:7: Mark Greener noted that an ichthvosaur was described as a "sea mammal": it was actually a reptile.

#### **NEW ADDRESS FOR** FT NEWS CLIPPINGS

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## **CORONAVIRUS CURIOSITIES**

#### Covid-19 lockdown has seen weird panics, bizarre policing and a boom in bunkers and horoscopes



OLI SCARFF / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

#### **COVID ASTROLOGY BOOM**

In January 2020, celebrity astrologer Susan Miller appeared on CBS New York and predicted that 2020 would "be a great year, and it will be a prosperous year." Capricorn would be the year's "celestial favourite", and Cancer was the most likely to wed; Libra was set to score in real estate and Taurus could expect a calendar full of international travel. After the scale of the coronavirus pandemic had become clear, users of her YouTube and Instagram feeds began to complain. "Susan, you're a very good writer but you forgot about the Covid-19 virus and the loss of jobs," said one. Another dissatisfied follower asked: "Why didn't you predict this, Susan? Covid-19 was major enough to see it coming!"

Nevertheless, despite their failure to foresee the pandemic,

astrologers are as popular as ever; in fact, several websites have reported higher-than-usual viewing figures for their horoscope-related stories. Major astrology sites like Astro and CafeAstrology and Susan Miller's own AstrologyZone all reported increased traffic in March.

"Astrology for us is a consistently high-performing category across all our sites," said Emma Rosenblum, editor in chief for the Bustle Digital Group's lifestyle category. She suggests that some people are placing their faith in astrology rather than traditional religions and spirituality in this time of anxiety and uncertainty.

Soon after the consternation over her inaccurate predictions, Susan Miller's followers began to ask her how she thought the pandemic would play out. In March, she issued a report laying the

blame on Pluto, which "deals with huge financial matters, masses of people - and viruses". She also explained why some countries have been affected more severely than others. Italy, for example, is ruled by Gemini, connected with the lungs, so it's no surprise that the country was hit so hard. Miller's report predicted the virus would be "raging" in the USA all through March, April and May, but would weaken in the summer months, reappearing in autumn and possibly as late as mid-December. Sceptics point out that this scenario is much the same as what many epidemiologists were forecasting around the same time. nytimes.com, 9 May 2020.

#### **CAVE ISOLATION**

Six foreign tourists interpreted India's strict coronavirus lockdown measures in an unconventional

LEFT: Stone stacks built by members of the public on their daily walks during the COVID-19 pandemic are pictured on the beach in Whitley Bay, North Tyneside, on 30 April.

way by hiding out in a cave in northern India's Uttarakhand state for a month. The group were found by police inside the cave near Rishikesh, the 'yoga capital of the world' made famous by The Beatles, who visited in 1968. The group, four men and two women from France, Turkey, Ukraine, the USA and Nepal, were asked to self-quarantine in a nearby ashram for two weeks, say police. They had initially been staying at a hotel, but when they ran out of money, decided to take refuge in the cave on 24 March. They had been attempting to ration their remaining food.

Indian and foreign tourists had been banned from entering Uttarakhand state since 20 March due to the coronavirus outbreak, and prime minister Narendra Modi announced a nationwide lockdown on 24 March. Authorities have launched a 'Stranded in India' website designed to help foreigners stuck in the country during the lockdown. To date, India has recorded 191,041 coronavirus cases and 5,413 deaths. edition.cnn.com, 21 Apr 2020.

#### **NZ BUNKER MENTALITY**

For some years, New Zealand has been popular with affluent American survivalists who have purchased luxury bunkers designed to withstand nuclear war or another global disaster, and furnished with all the necessities required to survive a breakdown of civilisation. (continued on p.6)



#### **PECULIAR PASSIONS**

Sex doll gives birth and other mad love stories

PAGE 10



#### **ARMS AND** THE WOMAN

Do transplanted limbs adapt to their recipients?

**PAGE 22** 



#### **BUT IS IT** ART?

From concept to catastrophe in the gallery

**PAGE 26** 

## THE CONSPIRASPHERE

NOEL ROONEY hears some recent rumblings on the 9/11-Saudi connection and finds that Glastonbury's 'spiritual activists' have been spooked by 5G

#### **WOO WOO ABOUT WIFI**

It's strangely poignant that in the middle of one world-altering event we should be reminded of another. Earlier this month, an inadvertent slip of the black redacting pen, in a document presented by the FBI to the courts, named a mid-ranking Saudi official who, it appears, is implicated in the 9/11 attacks. The document was disclosed as part of a lawsuit by families of the victims (just one of dozens of suits still in progress relating to the attacks, 18 years on) alleging Saudi collusion in the terrorist operation.

Mussaed Ahmed al-Jarrah, who worked at the Saudi embassy in Washington during 1999 and 2000, oversaw the activities of the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs in the USA. He is implicated with two other officials, Fahad al-Thumairy and Omar al-Bayoumi, who are strongly suspected of supporting two of the 19 plane hijackers, providing them with money, bank accounts and an apartment. This is the first time that al-Jarrah has been named publicly and, if FBI bluster is anything to go by, it has set the cat among the pigeons in Quantico.

The extent of Saudi involvement in the attacks has been a deeply unsettling topic for US security agencies; it's also a principal aspect of the conspiracy theories calling 9/11 an inside job, and a central element in many of the lawsuits still being pursued by families of victims. It will be interesting to see if the embarrassment caused to the FBI by the accidental disclosure gets as far as the Saudi government. In any case, it has certainly rejuvenated the 9/11 truth movement, which had been looking rather moribund of late. Curious that Donald Trump wasn't galvanised into tweeting on the subject, given his regular campaign promises to look into 9/11.

But then he is currently busy tweeting about another, less well-known, conspiracy theory from 2001, involving the accidental death of a young intern working for then Congressman (and now MSNBC presenter

and openly critical of the President) Joe Scarborough. Trump's hints that his ex-buddy Scarborough murdered the unfortunate Lori Klausutis have embarrassed the GOP, further antagonised the media, and brought the conspiracy trolls out of the æther to make life hell again for the Klausutis family. Who says the Donald can't multi-task?

Meanwhile, in leafy Glastonbury, conspiracy theory is shaping up to achieve the status of official policy. Last month, the council published a report demanding the UK government investigate the potential risks of 5G technology, and threatening (impotently but amusingly) to oppose the rollout of 5G infrastructure in the area. Several members of the committee tasked with discussing the issue resigned before the report was published, claiming that the whole process had been hijacked by conspiracy theorists and 'spiritual healers', one of whom did manage to get his thoughts on the deliciously tenuous link between 5G and coronavirus into the report.

But Glastonbury's spiritual activists only managed second place in the coronavirus conspiracy theory silly stakes, outpaced by the eagle-eyed pareidolia of an Australian conspiracist who noticed that the Aussie \$10 note includes an image of coronavirus. Apparently this is proof that the pandemic is a hoax, as the note has been in circulation since 2017, and is brought to you by the same group who organised a fetchingly petite anti-lockdown protest in Melbourne recently. I was disappointed by how lazy this claim turned out to be. The \$10 bill has a lot of interesting imagery which is ignored in favour of one passing resemblance, and there wasn't even a bit of investigative origami (a staple of good banknote conspiracism) to spice the proceedings. The caption on the Facebook photo exposing the nefarious monetary premonition reads, predictably: "You can't make this up!"

Oh yes you can!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

#### **CORONAVIRUS: WILL JUGGLERS AND CLOWNS HARVEST FRUIT AND VEGETABLES?**

BBC News, 2 April 2020.

#### Bear breaks in and eats grandad

D.Mirror, 5 Sept 2019. ......

#### LIONS COLLECTING **FOOD HAMPERS**

Wolverhampton Express & Star, 23 Nov 2019.

#### **Ask restaurant fined** over 'misleading' lobster

BBC News, 14 Jan 2020. .....

#### **LIONS AVOIDED CHOCOLATE MELTDOWN AS YOUNGSTERS TOOK PART IN EASTER TRAIL**

Waveney Advertiser (Suffolk), 26 April 2019.

#### **Hospital trusts** named after sandwiches kill five

Times, 18 June 2019.

## STRANGE DAYS

#### (continued from page 4)

Recently, the coronavirus pandemic and New Zealand's unquestioned success at having limited the spread of the disease has seen a marked rise in demand for these survival shelters.

Swift closure of borders and implementation of a four-week lockdown, together with New Zealand's island status and comparatively small population (c. five million), are regarded as factors in the country's success in combatting coronavirus; as of 31 May there were 1,504 infections and 22 deaths. For comparison, the Republic of Ireland, another island with a population of five million, had suffered 24,990 infections and 1,652 deaths by the same date.

California-based underground global shelter network Vivos has already installed a 300-person bunker north of Christchurch on New Zealand's South Island, according to its founder Robert Vicino. He says he received two calls last week from prospective clients eager to build additional shelters on the island. Twentyfour families moved into a Vivosconstructed 5,000-person shelter in South Dakota recently, a bunker on a former military base around three-quarters the size of Manhattan. Vivos has also built an 80-person bunker in Indiana, and is developing a 1,000-person shelter in Germany.

Another survival shelter company, Rising S Co, has also constructed about 10 private bunkers

in New Zealand over the past few years. The average cost is \$3 million (£2.5million), but the price can rise to \$8million (£6.5million) with the addition of luxury bathrooms, game rooms, shooting ranges, gyms, theatres and surgical beds. In March, Rising S Co was contacted by a Silicon Valley executive who owned one of their multimillion-dollar bunkers in New Zealand, 11ft (3.5m) underground. He wanted to know how to open the bunker's secret door as, never having used it before, he had forgotten the code. bloomberg.com, 19 Apr; npr.org, 25 Apr; BBC News, 26 Apr 2020.

#### **INDIAN BANKNOTE PANICS**

Three banknotes to the value of 800 rupees (£8.50) seen on a footpath in Surat, a city in Gujarat state, caused a coronavirus scare after some people claimed the notes had been thrown by a suspicious person loitering in the area who had applied his saliva and sweat to them. A Surat Municipal Corporation team collected the notes in a biomedical waste bag. The entire area was sanitised and vegetables from a nearby shop disposed of. Police are talking to local shop owners and asking them to check their CCTV. "The CCTV footage will help us identify the person who dropped the notes," said a police officer. "Someone who has a business rivalry with the vegetable shop owner might be behind the mischief." timesofindia.com, 19 Apr 2020.

- In Janakpur, Nepal, two women were arrested after throwing money in the street and running away. One of them later tested as coronavirus positive. A police spokesperson stated that the women had spat on 10, 20 and 100 rupee (6p/12p/66p) notes prior to flinging them down. Police identified the pair using CCTV footage. english.khabarhub.com, 18 Apr 2020.
- Several higher-value rupee banknotes lay scattered in the road in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, but no one dared pick them up, apparently fearing coronavirus infection. Four were 500 rupee (£5.30) notes and one was a 100 rupee (£1) note. After some discussion, officers from the local police station attended the scene and retrieved the cash. It appears that the banknotes fell from someone's pocket, although CCTV cameras yielded no clue as to the original owner. Anyone who has lost 2,100 rupees (£22.25) is advised to approach police to collect it. english.newstracklive.com, 19 Apr 2020.
- Similar stories have been reported in the city of Mysuru (Mysore) in Karnataka state, southwest India. In one case, a tea seller who had picked up 15 one- and two-rupee coins was told to close his shop and stay at home under quarantine while officials tested the coins for possible infection. bangaloremirror.com, indiatimes.com, 24 Apr 2020.

• Police in the city of Nashik in Maharashtra state arrested a Muslim man who allegedly filmed himself licking and wiping his nose with a handful of banknotes while describing the coronavirus as "a punishment by Allah". The video, circulated widely on social media, features the unnamed man threatening to distribute the notes around town in order to spread the disease. opindia.com, 24 Apr 2020.

#### **WEIRD LOCKDOWN**

An Indonesian official issued an unusual edict to combat the number of people visiting her region without first self-isolating for the required 14 days. Kusdinar Untung Yuni Sukowati, head of central Java's Sragen Regency area, instructed local people to repurpose abandoned houses believed to be haunted. "If there's an empty and haunted house in the village," she said, "put people in there and lock them up." Sragen Regency has recently seen an influx of people fleeing the capital Jakarta and other major cities. boingboing.net.23 Apr 2020.

• A Malaysian man is also making use of belief in ghosts and spirits to maintain lockdown in his village. Muhammad Urabil wears a white robe and a mask when he goes out on night time patrols in Kemaman, northeast Malaysia. Wild hair and a flowing beard add to his eerie appearance. Mr Urabil, 38, says he was prompted to act the phantom





MOHD RASFAN / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: In Manila, youth workers dressed as Star Wars characters to encourage lockdown. ABOVE RIGHT: Muhammad Urabil, the lockdown phantom of Kemaman village.

## STRANGE DAYS

after hearing about Malaysia's growing coronavirus problems. "I am watching the news and I see more people are dead," he told a reporter. "So I... decided to scare people," His method appears to be having some success; belief in the supernatural runs deep in Malaysia, particularly in rural areas. Whenever village youngsters see him, says Mr Urabil, they "run like crazy back to their homes. Now before they go out, they have to check whether the ghost is around or not." He was initially concerned about being arrested, but local police have thanked him for his efforts and had their photo taken with him. yahoo.com, 17 Apr 2020.

 Local Philippines officials dressed as Star Wars characters to encourage compliance with coronavirus quarantine measures. Youth leaders in Darth Vader and Stormtrooper outfits made from rubber mats and old plastic caught the attention of villagers on the outskirts of Manila, who were then reminded to stay indoors. On 4 May, internationally recognised as 'Star Wars Day', government workers in costume also rode small wooden boats to distribute relief packs containing rice and canned goods. yahoo. com, 4 May 2020.

#### **FISH TANK FATALITY**

An Arizona man died after he and his wife, both in their 60s, drank fish tank cleaner containing chloroquine phosphate. The anti-malaria drug chloroquine had been promoted by President Trump as a coronavirus treatment. Unfortunately, the dose taken by the couple proved vastly higher than that in a malaria pill. The wife, who keeps koi carp, said the couple had been selfisolating and thought they were becoming ill. "I saw the cleaner sitting on the back shelf and I said, 'Hey isn't that the stuff they were talking about on TV?" They became ill minutes after drinking the liquid. Her husband died in hospital. Metro, 25 Mar 2020

#### **COVID-19 EXORCISM**

A West African king has held a form of exorcism ceremony designed to stave off coronavirus. King Amon N'Douffou V is ruler



ABOVE: King Amon N'Douffou V and his notables perform an exorcism ceremony to drive coronavirus from the African continent.

of the Akan people who live in Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) and Ghana. He arrived in the capital of his Sanwi kingdom, the village of Krindjabo, to the sound of tam-tam drums, explaining via an announcer (royals don't address the public directly) that they had gathered here to ward off the "bad spell", also referring to coronavirus as a "bad spirit".

"I ask God... to protect the population and keep this virus away from the kingdom, Ivory Coast and the world," said the King. "Human beings have to redefine their space in this world and respect nature," he declared. "Without that, we will always be confronted with these epidemics". He then poured two bottles of alcohol onto the ground as an offering. Such events, held to ward off natural disasters like flooding or drought, are usually attended by hundreds, but owing to coronavirus restrictions limiting public gatherings to less than 50 people, only a few were present. 'Komians', traditional female healers dressed in white, purified the royal court by sprinkling alcohol on the ground, and those in attendance daubed their faces with the wet earth as a sign of obeisance to the king, lifting

their heads towards the Sun.

"In Africa, we live in two worlds", said Ben Kottia, the King's counsellor, "the visible and the invisible." He explained that only kings have the power to request the protection of the invisible world. Another potential ceremony, if the king decrees it, is the 'adjalou', a procession through the village intended to protect people.

"During Adjalou, these women are naked and we confine men and children in their homes," explained Mr Kottia. "The women erect barricades at the entrance of villages to prevent bad spirits from entering and claiming lives."

Around 20 per cent of Côte d'Ivoire's population are animists, with Christians and Muslims accounting for 40 per cent each, although it is not uncommon for people of either faith to also practise animist rituals. dailytrust.com.ng, 27 Apr; guardian.ng, 28 Apr 2020.

#### **SPANISH FLU SURVIVOR TO CORONAVIRUS VICTIM**

A 108-year-old woman who survived the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic is believed to have become the UK's oldest coronavirus victim. Hilda Churchill died at a

care home in Salford, Manchester, hours after testing positive for Covid-19, and eight days before her 109th birthday.

The current pandemic had prompted her to reminisce about the Spanish flu, according to her grandson, Anthony Churchill. "When I visited her last, we talked about coronavirus and mentioned we might not see her for a while," he recalled. "She said it was very similar to the Spanish flu, but in her day there were no planes and somehow it still managed to spread everywhere."

Mrs Churchill, a seamstress, became infected with Spanish flu along with most of her family in their home in Crewe. They all survived, except for her 12-monthold baby sister, Beryl May. "She remembered standing at her bedroom window and seeing this little coffin carrying her baby sister being put into a carriage and being taken away," her grandson said. "She remembers everyone getting it and her mother trying to look after them and her father collapsing and having to be carried home. She was saying how amazing it is that something you can't see can be so devastating." guardian.co.uk, 29 Mar 2020.

## **SIDELINES...**

#### **POPULAR BURIAL**

John Bradshaw, of Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire, was doing some gardening during the coronavirus lockdown when he unearthed a near-complete car buried in the middle of his garden. He identified it as a 1950s Ford Popular. It was largely undamaged, with engine and number plate intact. BBC News, 8 Apr 2020.

#### **MERC BURIAL**

A South African politician was buried in his beloved E500 Mercedes. Tshekede Pitso, 72, had both of his hands on the steering wheel of the car, which was lowered along ramps down into the 8ft (2.5m) grave. *D.Mail, 2 Apr 2020.* 

#### **INKED MEMENTOS**

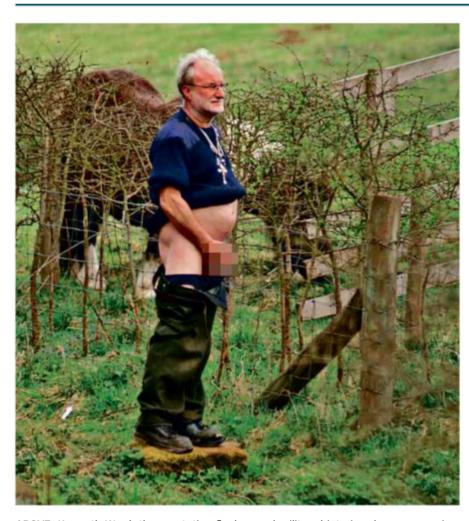
Father and son Michael and Kyle Sherwood, Ohio morticians, run a business removing tattooed skin from dead loved ones, framing the designs and delivering them to the next of kin. A typical job costs around \$1,000. *D.Mirror, 4 Jan 2020.* 

#### **SCARED PIG RESCUED**

Rescuers pumped away 8,000 litres (1,760 gallons) of water from a flooded animal reserve to save Barry the pig, who grew up in an urban environment where he developed a fear of mud and water. He had become trapped after storms, but Thames Water sent a tanker to pump out the flood water after Barry's rescue farm appealed for help. Sun, 4 Apr 2020.



## WHERE THE BODIES ARE BURIED



**ABOVE**: Kenneth Ward, the gun-toting flasher and military historian; human remains have recently been found on his property in North Yorkshire.

## BODIES FOUND AT HOME OF MILITARY HISTORIAN FLASHER

The remains of two people have been found in the garden of a North Yorkshire farmhouse once owned by a gun-toting flasher and military historian. Kenneth Ward, 72, who now lives in a York caravan park, was jailed for five years in 2011 after a sustained campaign of harassment and intimidation against his neighbour Mandy Dunford. She says he tormented her for nine years, flashing at her every day, standing half-naked or following her around dressed only in boots and socks. On one occasion he pointed a rifle at her and, as she fled, fired five shots. When Ward was arrested 10 years ago, police searching his home found an array of illegal weapons, including a loaded Luger pistol. Now, two jawbones and other human remains have been dug up at Ward's former property of Appletree Cottage in Chop Gate village near the North Yorkshire moors.

Police in nearby Middlesbrough have expressed interest in the finds, as in 2018

## Police searching his home found an array of illegal weapons

they launched a cold case investigation into the deaths or disappearances of three young women. The naked body of sex worker Vicky Glass, 21, was discovered in Danby, less than 20 miles from Chop Gate in 2000. Rachel Wilson, 19, another sex worker, was found dead in a ditch near Middlesbrough in 2002. And 17-year-old Donna Keogh disappeared after a Middlesbrough house party in 1998; her body was never found. However, forensic archæologists' initial findings suggest the remains found at Appletree Cottage are decades old. Sun, 4 Apr 2020.

#### **FERRY CORPSE**

A British man described as a recluse was apprehended trying to cross the Channel by ferry

with his mother's body. Simon Odgers, 53, was about to board a ferry at Calais with the corpse of Barbara Odgers, 86, in the passenger seat of his car. She had apparently died some hours previously, and Mr Odgers told officials he thought she was asleep, and that she was ill with cancer and suffered repeated falls. But, on finding cuts and bruises on her body, Mr Odgers was suspected of murder. He was taken to a secure mental facility where has was said to be in a "confused" state. Mother and son lived on the Isle of Wight and owned three French properties. One of these, a chateau in Vernon, in the Ardèche, was searched by French police who say they found traces of blood on the staircase. Neighbours reported hearing shouting the evening before Mr Odgers' abortive cross-Channel trip, and describe him as a reclusive individual who did not socialise with them. D. Telegraph, 26 Nov 2019.

## **CURSE OF THE KENNEDYS CONTINUES**

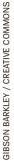
Maeve Kennedy Townsend McKean, 40, and her son Gideon, eight, were found dead after failing to return from a canoeing trip at Chesapeake Bay, Maryland. Maeve is the granddaughter of Bobby Kennedy, shot dead in Los Angeles in 1968; his brother John F Kennedy was of course assassinated in Dallas in 1963. Their third brother Edward was embroiled in the 1969 Chappaquiddick incident, a traffic accident in which his female passenger died. Nine other Kennedys have died prematurely since 1944, succumbing to plane crashes, skiing accidents, drug overdoses and other misfortunes. Metro, 6 Apr 2020.

## SWEDISH WOMAN'S DEATH 'CLASSIFIED AS SECRET'

On 4 December 2005, Annie Borjesson, 30, was found dead on Prestwick Beach, near Glasgow Prestwick Airport. The Swedish woman was lying face down and was fully clothed.

## **STRANGE DAYS**







**ABOVE**: Twelve Tribes members perform a wedding dance representing the battle of Armageddon. **BELOW**: Annie Borjesson, whose 2005 death is "classified as secret".

Her bag, passport, and wallet were discovered next to her. She had moved to Edinburgh to study English the previous year. Scottish and Swedish authorities stated her death was most likely due to suicide by drowning, but her family did not believe this.

A number of conspiracy theories appeared in the following years. One theory was based on the fact that Prestwick Airport was then being used for CIA rendition flights, to transfer 'extralegal' prisoners between countries. Documents that formed part of a year-long investigation by the Swedish and Scottish authorities recently emerged, but are heavily redacted, apparently because Borjesson's death is deemed "classified as secret" by the Swedish foreign ministry, and "that the information concerns Sweden's relations with a foreign state and a foreign authority". It was stated that full disclosure of the redacted information "will damage Sweden's international relations or, in other ways harm national interests".

Borjesson's mother, Guje Borjesson, told reporters she was "troubled" by Sweden's secrecy and plans to appeal to Swedish authorities for the full release of all files relating to her daughter's death. She is also asking to see post-mortem photographs, which the Scottish Crown Office has so far refused to release. dailymail.co.uk, 6 Mar 2020.

#### **TWELVE TRIBES BURIALS**

Police investigating the Australian Twelve Tribes

religious sect say they have discovered the remains of at least one baby in a coffinlike box. The searches at two Twelve Tribes properties, one at Peppercorn Creek Farm in Picton, and at a 78.5-hectare property near Bigga, southwest of Sydney, followed claims of stillbirths and burials amongst the secretive group, which rejects birth control, modern medicine and technology, relying instead on homeopathy and natural remedies. The Bigga site has no running water or electricity, and is used only when the sect wishes to exile errant members.

The Twelve Tribes organisation, a registered charity, has about 120 members in its Picton, Katoomba and Coledale communes and runs cafes in Sydney and the Blue Mountains. It has been in Australia since the 1990s, where it has been under investigation by police since 2019. It began in 1975 in Chattanooga, Tennessee, when former carnival showman Gene Spriggs left the First Presbyterian Church;

Presbyterian Churche disapproved of services being cancelled for the Super Bowl. It has 3,000 members worldwide, in the USA, Canada, France, Spain, Argentina, Brazil, Germany and England.

Twelve Tribes practices a hybrid of primitive Christianity and Judaism, mixed with Spriggs's own teachings.

The group aims to bring about the return of Jesus (or, as they call him, Yahshua) by re-establishing the 12 tribes of Israel and the early Christian church, as described in the Acts of the Apostles. These tribes would include 144,000 'perfect male children', accounting for the group's obsessive and controversial child-rearing practices.

Twelve Tribes is guarded and secretive, and members of the sect are expected to live by a set of strict guidelines that rule virtually every aspect of their lives. All members must sell their possessions and give the proceeds to the group. They are assigned a Hebrew name instead of their old ones: Spriggs himself is known as 'Yoneq'. Communication with the outside world is forbidden, as is TV or any other entertainment media. Women are expected to be subservient to men and everyone must marry within the group. They follow strict dietary laws in accordance with Jewish tradition, and abstain from alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. Children are not allowed to play with toys and are supervised at all times, beaten with a 50cm (1.6ft) rod for every infraction by any adult present, not just their parents. They are all taught at home and do not attend university, which is considered a waste of time. Instead, children work in the community from a young age, which has led to accusations of child labour. Estée Lauder and other businesses cut ties with the organisation after learning children were involved in the manufacture of their products.

The Bigga raid came about when former member
Rosemary Cruzado revealed her late-term stillborn baby was buried there. She believes her baby's death could have been avoided if she had had access to a doctor earlier in her pregnancy.dailymail.

co.uk, 8 Mar;
dailypost.
co.uk, 31
Mar 2020.

#### SIDELINES...

#### **TANNED GREEN**

Mother-of-two Jenni Coleman's face turned bright green after she had used an out-of-date fake tan. Ms Coleman, of Wythenshawe, Manchester, said people had compared her new look to the Wicked Witch of the West. It took several days to come off. Some fake tans contain dihydroxyacetone (DHA) which reacts to amino acids in the skin to produce a bronze colour. It can turn skin green if exposed to oxygen or heat over time. *D.Mail, 31 Mar 2020.* 

#### FERRET FUSILLADE

A man who had lived in woods outside Harrogate, North Yorkshire, for five years threw a box of ferrets at passing cars after downing 10 pints of beer last December. Brash Bullows [sic] jumped on car bonnets, smashed windscreens and punched one motorist after being refused a lift. Nine vehicles needed expensive repairs. The ferrets were rescued by the RSPCA. Bullows, 25, was jailed for 21 months. Sun, D.Mail, 14 Mar 2020.

#### **WATER OF LIFE**

A documentary about Scottish seminarians in Rome showed Pope Francis brandishing a bottle of Scotch and proclaiming it as "the real water of life". The bottle of Oban 14-year-old single malt was a gift from the Scottish student priests, but the clip was removed from the film after being censored by Vatican officials. thetimes.co.uk, 15 Apr 2020.

#### MARBLE LUST

Visitors to the National Portrait Gallery in London have been kissing the marble statue of Charles James Fox, the 18th century radical Whig politician and notorious Lothario, leaving his marble lips smeared with lipstick. D.Telegraph, 12 Mar 2020.



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### **SIDELINES...**

#### **BULL SHOCK**

A bull using a utility pole as a scratching post ended up knocking out the electricity for over 700 homes in a Scottish town. Ron, the 4-year-old bull, rubbed up against the pole and knocked the transformer box to the ground, somehow managing to avoid an 11,000 volt shock. upi.com, 14 May 2020.

#### PIT BULL DRIVER

Washington State troopers arrested a man whose pit bull was in the driver's seat after a high-speed car chase. "He was driving very erratically... multiple people called 911," said a police spokesperson. After colliding with two other vehicles and failing to stop, a 109mph (175km/h) pursuit ensued with the suspect driving "absolutely recklessly". Upon arrest, the man explained he was "trying to teach his dog how to drive." edition.cnn. com, 31 Mar 2020.

#### **APTLY NAMED**

Single mother Amanda Johnson tried out her son's metal detector in her back garden in Portsmouth, in an area called Moneyfields. About 8in (20cm) under the lawn, she unearthed a Henry VII gold coin called an angel (showing St Michael slaying a dragon), dating from about 1500. D.Mirror, 15 April 2020.

#### NAME AND SHAME

A Russian utility company uses giant speaking pyramids that broadcast customers' debts to the public. The huge black-and-yellow contraptions weigh over a tonne and are wheeled into position outside the alleged debtor's home. A tape loop broadcasts the debt every 10 minutes. Previous attempts at debt recovery involved beaming laser projections of the sums owed onto the walls of customers' homes. <i>, 27 Sep 2019.



**MAD LOVE** Army vet has baby with sex doll, woman gets attached to light fixture, plus a giant vagina in the woods



ABOVE: Terry Wayne East and his 'wife' Stephanie, pictured with the 'baby' to which she 'gave birth'. BELOW: The 'sex hut'.

#### STEPHANIE SAYS

US Army veteran Terry Wayne East is 'married' to a life-sized doll named Stephanie, whose social media pages show her treating Terry to home-cooked meals at their North Dakota home. Other photos depict Terry accepting holiday gifts from her, or show her passed out on the floor after a night's drinking.

An account of how they had met appears on Stephanie's Facebook page: "I met Terry W East online and two weeks later I was out of tyranny away from my homeland China and in his arms on my way to becoming an American." Stephanie features over-sized breasts on a small, childlike frame, and recently 'gave birth' to a baby doll.

Comments on Stephanie's social media page suggest that Terry East is a "wounded veteran that came back not right in the head", taking Stephanie as his 'wife'. "His family and friends were even a part of it,", said one poster. "His mom was there for the 'birth' of the baby." The poster also claimed that Stephanie was eventually displaced in favour of a real woman, who had agreed to marry Terry, but who had recently died. Since

then, Stephanie's Facebook page appears to have gone quiet and attempts to confirm or deny the allegations remain unanswered. popularmilitary. com, 17 Mar 2020.

#### **LINCOLNSHIRE SEX HUT**

An urban explorer, whose YouTube channel features videos in which he looks around abandoned places, discovered a 'sex hut' in woods between Market Rasen and Caistor, Lincolnshire. Mannequins adorned with paint and children's toys were strewn nearby, some leaning against trees, and several

mannequins' lower-halves were piled up in a corner of the hut. The hut itself was lined with red cloth and had a small round entrance. A discarded leaflet found in the hut that featured cartoon woodland animals referred to a "giant vagina" and the "jizz pit". In his video, explorer Steve Gray (Ste G on YouTube) is visibly shocked by the hut, calling it a "messed up place" and exclaiming "This is the womb, we are inside the womb!" The hut and its immediate surroundings appear to have been the venue for a 2018 rave. "This was a



## STRANGE DAYS



rave made by transsexuals". said a comment on Ste G's channel. "I attended this event and it was an awesome weekend really messed up but so funny. shame they didn't clean up the sight [sic] after". grimsbytelegraph.co.uk, 14 May 2020.

#### **MS LIBERTY LIGHTS UP**

The UK press regulator, Ipso, has ruled against Leeds woman Amanda Liberty, who had complained about an article in tabloid newspaper the Sun, mocking her public declaration of love for a 92-year-old German chandelier.

Ms Liberty, in her mid-30s, argued that the Sun article breached the regulator's code of conduct requiring newspapers to avoid prejudicial or pejorative references to an individual's sexuality. She also queried the article's accuracy, as it claimed she was married to the chandelier. In fact, as she pointed out, although she was in a long-term relationship with Lumiere (the name she has given to the intricate light fitting she purchased on eBay) they were not yet married.

Ms Liberty identifies as an 'objectum sexual' (an individual attracted to objects) and had objected to being nominated for Sun columnist Jane Moore's end-ofyear 'Dagenham Award (Two Stops Past Barking)' prize.

Sun lawyers successfully argued that, while not doubting the sincerity of Ms Liberty's attraction to chandeliers, sexual orientation in the context of the press regulation code only covered those people attracted to the same sex, the opposite sex, or both. They also pointed out that Ms Liberty had in the past talked extensively to the media about her attraction towards chandeliers and other objects. Some time ago, she had changed her surname to Liberty to reflect her then relationship with New York's Statue of Liberty. For more obscure objects of desire, see FT240:22-23, 357:8-9, 388:8. theguardian.com, 14 Apr 2020.





TOP: Amanda Liberty and the 92-year-old German chandelier with which she is now romantically involved. ABOVE: Ms Liberty, seen here in 2011, changed her name to reflect an earlier relationship with the NYC landmark, which came to an end in 2016.

## **SIDELINES...**

#### SHELL COMPANY

English landlords have been legally avoiding paying rates by placing breeding snails in boxes in their empty properties and claiming them to be snail farms. Empty business premises are subject to a business rates charge, but an agricultural property is exempt under current legislation. D.Telegraph, 18 Feb 2020.

#### **SCARE BEAR**

Villagers in Sikandarpur, Uttar Pradesh, are taking turns to dress up as a bear in order to scare off an army of 2,000 monkeys who have attacked 150 children. Metro, 4 Feb 2020.

#### SISTERS REUNITED

Two Cambodian sisters who each believed the other had been murdered by the Khmer Rouge were reunited after over four decades apart. Granny Bun Sen, 98, embraced Granny Bun Chea, 101, after returning to her home village 47 years after she fled in 1973. D.Telegraph, 24 Feb 2020.

#### THIRD TIME LUCKY

An incompetent robber was jailed after attempting to rob the same bank three times. Cecil Stephens grabbed some banknotes at a Natwest branch in Birmingham, returning the next day wearing a towel round his head as a disguise. He managed to grab more cash but discarded it after learning it was dyed red. After robbing another bank the same day, he returned to the Natwest where he was recognised and arrested. Metro, 24 Feb 2020.

#### SHOPPING ADDICTION

Researchers say shopping addiction should be classified as a mental illness, following a sharp increase in the number of people displaying obsessive behaviour. The convenience of Internet shopping is considered a contributory factor. Buying-shopping disorder (BSD) is defined as an "extreme preoccupation with... shopping", and an "irresistible... urge to possess consumer goods". Persons with BSD typically spend more than they can afford, buying things they neither need, nor are able to use for pleasure. D.Telegraph, 15 Nov 2019.

## **SIDELINES...**

#### WATER INTO WINE I

A fault at Setticani winery in Modena, Italy, meant that thousands of litres of red wine was pumped into the local water supply. The fruity Lambrusco flowed from taps in villagers' homes as they rushed to bottle the stuff. A winery worker said: "People are now talking about 'the miracle of Setticani' and comparing it to Jesus". The mistake was hastily rectified, but not before villagers made the most of it. Massimo Bosi, a local man, filled 100 bottles. D. Telegraph, 5 Mar; D.Mail, 6 Mar 2020.

#### WATER INTO WINE II

People in an apartment building in Kerala, southern India, found a mixture of beer, brandy and rum gushing from their kitchen taps. Customs officials had buried 6,000 litres of confiscated alcohol in a pit on court orders. thedrinksbusiness.com, 6 Mar; Sydney Morning Herald, 7-8 Mar 2020.

#### HEALING THE BLIND

A Polish man had been blind for over two decades. After being struck by a car on a zebra crossing, Janusz Goraj regained his sight and now works as a security guard at the hospital where he was treated. Doctors could not explain what caused him to see again. D.Star, 3 Feb 2020.

#### VIBE OF THE VALKYRIES

Police rushed to a Vienna concert hall after a suitcase in the cloakroom began "shaking suspiciously" during a performance of Wagner's Siegfried Idyll and the first act of The Valkyrie. An explosives expert examined the suitcase to find a buzzing vibrator that had somehow switched itself on. After the performance, "the suitcase was handed over to its owner and his lady friend," said a police spokesperson, "and the officers wished them a nice evening." Times, 8 Nov

#### **ONE GIANT LEAK**

Astronaut urine could be used to build lunar stations. Moon dust mixed with urine produces geopolymer concrete suitable for constructing semi-permanent habitats on the Moon's surface. This would be far cheaper than transporting materials from Earth. D.Mirror, 31 Mar 2020.

STRANGE FALLS | A black rain in Japan, plummeting bats in Israel and airborne aubergines in Iran





ABOVE LEFT: One of the dead bats photographed in a Tel Aviv park. ABOVE RIGHT: Aubergines fly past Tehran's Milad Tower.

#### **BLACK RAIN**

Mysterious black rain fell on Japan in early March, days after one of the fiercest lightning storms on record hit Tokyo.

The rain, which resembled thin black paint and left sootcoloured puddles, ignited fears that it was somehow connected to the coronavirus pandemic, with locals speculating on social media that the cause might be the mass cremation of bodies. Others said the strange sight was "about as bad an omen as you can get these days."

Black rain is a shocking sight for some older Japanese people, since dark radioactive rain had dropped from the skies over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, a by-product of nuclear fallout. This year's rain was tested for radioactivity, but none was found. There was speculation that a fire in a plastics factory in Hasuda, 20 miles (32 km) north of Tokyo, had sent fine particles of ash into the atmosphere, later to fall on the city in a rainstorm.

Black, yellow, green and even red rains have all been recorded before. In Kerala, India, heavy downpours of blood-coloured rain fell for almost a month in 2001. It was estimated that 50,000kg (110,000lb) of the strange red liquid had fallen in total. Two physicists, Godfrey Louis and Santhosh Kumar, suggested the rain might be connected to a comet that had

## Downpours of blood-coloured rain fell for almost a month

disintegrated over the region in their article 'Cometary panspermia explains the red rain of Kerala' (see FT209:16). Of course, mysterious falls from the sky are classic fortean phenomena. Recently, around 200 starlings were found dead, having fallen over Anglesey, North Wales (FT388:4). Worms (FT262:24-25), fish (FT276:24-25) and toads (FT309:18) have also been recorded, and in 1876, large pieces of red meat fell from a clear sky onto farmland near Olympia Springs in Bath County, Kentucky (FT346:4). dailystar.co.uk, thesun.co.uk, 5 Mar 2020.

#### **FALLING BATS IN ISRAEL**

Dozens of dead bats have fallen from the sky in Israel. A man spotted the lifeless creatures while walking through the Gan Leumi park in Ramat Gan, east of Tel Aviv. He shared four photos of the dead bats on social media, before another resident, several miles away, posted a video of the same sight. The clip shows a woman moving from one corpse to another. A resident of nearby Bnei Brak also found dead bats on the ground. Many of the bats are reportedly young and show no signs of trauma, leaving one expert puzzled. "The phenomenon is extremely rare," said Nora Lifshitz, founder of the Israeli Bat Society. (See also David Hambling's letter, FT392:71). dailystar.co.uk, 26 Mar 2020.

#### **FAKE AUBERGINE RAIN**

Iranian police arrested five people for their involvement in a prank video that showed aubergines falling from the sky. It is not clear what offence the arrested men were accused of. One of the viral clips shows a man trying to pose for a photo with Tehran's iconic Milad Tower in the background when suddenly a hail of aubergines starts coming down.

Amid online speculation, it was suggested that the video had been made by an "Amin Taghipour, an Iranian living in Canada proficient in special effects who works in Hollywood". Iran state news said: "He had visited Iran for his father's funeral but his flight back was cancelled over the coronavirus outbreak and now he is trying to have fun". Iran has been badly hit by coronavirus, with nearly 140,000 people infected and 7,500 dead. guardian.co.uk, 16 Mar 2020.



## The sweating sickness

DAVID HAMBLING finds that the terrifying epidemic of 1485 offers parallels with our current state

The country is terrified by a disease never seen before, as mysterious as it is deadly. The epidemic spreads rapidly and people flee or isolate themselves for protection. The symptoms are fever, headache, exhaustion – and death. Unlike other pestilences, which disproportionately affect the poor, this one strikes rich and poor alike. Unusually, it leaves most children unharmed. Some blame foreigners for bringing the disease to Britain, while others point the finger at the doctors treating it.

SCIENCE

The year is not 2020, but 1485, and the disease is not coronavirus but an unidentified condition popularly known as 'sweating sickness' or simply 'sweat'. Doctors refer to it as *Sudor Anglicus* ('English Sweat'); the broadsheets called it 'the New Acquaintance,' or 'stop gallant' for taking so many rich young men (see **FT129:14**).

The Sweat killed with incredible speed. Sometimes the onset of symptoms was followed by death just two or three hours later, with one chronicler writing that a victim might be merry at dinner and dead by supper. Another wrote that "there were some dancing in the court at nine o'clock that were dead at eleven'.

The main symptom was profuse and foul-smelling sweat, followed by unconsciousness and death. Anybody surviving 24 hours could expect a full recovery.

John Caius's A Boke or Counseill against the Disease Commonly Called the Sweate or the Sweating Sickness laid down the cause in no uncertain terms. The English were susceptible because, as has been echoed often in the last 500 years, they had become too soft.

"Children be so brought up, that if they be not all daie by the fire with a toste and butire, and in their furres, they be streight sicke," Caius grumbled. He also blamed the English diet, in particular drinking beer rather than wine. He claimed the best treatment was to sweat the sickness out. He recommended a variety of herbs to encourage sweating, including tansy, wormwood, and feverfew, and insisted that the patient must be kept warm.

Sweating sickness first appeared in 1485 among troops dispersing after the Battle of Bosworth Field, which ended the Wars of the Roses, brought, some said, by French mercenaries, though the disease was not known in France. It spread rapidly, killing up to a third of the population in some communities, and reaching all corners of the country within a matter of months. Further outbreaks occurred in 1506, 1517, 1528



# Unlike other pestilences, it strikes rich and poor alike and leaves most children unharmed

and finally in 1551.

The Sweat was confined to the English. It did not spread outside the country, stopping at the Scottish border. "It reigneth in no country but the King's dominion," wrote Sir Brian Tuke, who survived the disease, adding that it was "not esteemed" by the French. Nor did the Sweat affect foreigners in England, suggesting they had some kind of native immunity. This changed with the 1528 outbreak, which spread to Northern Europe, including modern Germany, Scandinavia, and Poland.

Sweating sickness may have influenced English history. Henry VIII was terrified when the disease reappeared in London in 1528 and fled from the capital to one house after another in quick succession, finally settling in the Hertfordshire home of the Abbot of St Albans. He feared divine punishment, but was not sure whether it was because he was planning to part from his queen, Catherine of Aragon, as Cardinal Wolsey told him, or because his marriage to her was technically incestuous in the first place.

When Henry's mistress Anne Boleyn came down with the sweating sickness, she was ordered home to Hever Castle. The king wrote frequently, and sent a royal doctor to attend her. When Anne recovered, Henry apparently took it as a sign of divine approval. He went ahead and nullified his marriage to Catherine and married his mistress.

Others were not so fortunate. Henry's councillor Thomas Cromwell, the protagonist of Hilary Mantell's *Wolf Hall* and its sequels,

lost his wife and two daughters to the sweating sickness in 1529. Cromwell's young son Gregory survived – only to die in the 1551 outbreak at the age of 31. Having the disease once did not provide immunity.

After the last epidemic, the Sweat vanished and no further definite cases were reported, leaving its identity a mystery. Contemporary observers distinguished sweating sickness from plague, malaria, and typhus, which were all well known.

There are many lines of speculation. The rapid spread and sudden onset hint at influenza, but there is a curious lack of respiratory symptoms such as coughing or sneezing which would accompany flu. Others have suggested meningitis, which can produce a sudden fever and death, but this also brings skin blotches not seen in sweating sickness.

The outbreaks all occurred in the summer months, typical of diseases spread by animals such as fleas, ticks, or mosquitoes. The summer outbreaks appeared to follow heavy rainfall, a characteristic of mosquitoborne disease. Viral hæmorrhagic fever would fit the bill, except for the fact that this too is always accompanied by marks on the skin.

Another theory was formulated in 2001 after terrorists sent anthrax spores through the US mail, causing five deaths through inhalational anthrax. This is a rarely seen condition, and the symptoms turned out to be notably different from the more common cutaneous and gastrointestinal versions of anthrax but notably similar to sweating sickness.

There are many suspects but little evidence. Several researchers have suggested identifying the disease by isolating DNA or RNA from the tombs of known victims. So far all efforts to do this have failed.

One alternative suggestion is that the 'disease' was actually the result of English medical practice. Caius's suggestion that patients should be kept hot and made to sweat could produce potentially lethal dehydration, especially when combined with purging, a common medical treatment at the time. The victims died of a variety of other causes, exacerbated by the treatment.

This would help explain why so many of the victims were wealthy; the poor could not afford expensive (and dangerous) doctors.

Five centuries later, we are far better prepared to deal with pandemics. But the tendency to blame foreigners, to bemoan the country's lack of grit, and to distrust the medical profession all seem to have stayed with us.



ARCHÆOLOGY A MONTHLY EXCAVATION OF ODDITIES AND ANTIQUITIES

**PAUL SIEVEKING** rounds up the news, including a murdered mummy and the relics of a Kentish saint .....

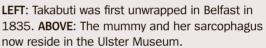
#### **MUMMY MURDER MYSTERY**

A mummy in a finely painted coffin was brought back from western Thebes (modern Luxor) by Thomas Greg, 30, son of the High Sheriff of Antrim, who presented it to the Belfast Natural History Society. It was the first mummy ever seen in Ireland and among the first to be unrolled outside Egypt. The unwrapping took place on 27 January 1835 in the upper room of the Society's museum in College Square North, attended by about 130 "learned men", and supervised by the museum's curator, William Darragh (1813-92), a skilled bird taxidermist. The results of a comprehensive scientific examination of the mummy were made public in January 2020, on the 185th anniversary of the unwrapping. A detailed account of the unwrapping appeared in the local press in 1835, including the findings of a phrenological expert who concluded that the mummy was "a person of much firmness and caution of character. and of a high degree of intellectual capacity, but little or no taste [!]". John Campbell made a coloured sketch of the wrapped body, and William Darragh Jr (1851-1939, son of the curator,) made a watercolour – now in the possession of his great granddaughter, Val Stevenson, sometime FT reviews editor. William Darragh Jr was later Editor of the Northern Whig and Belfast Telegraph, and a member of the Magic Circle.

The mummy was a young woman in her 20s, 5ft 1in tall, named Takabuti. She was the daughter of Nespare, a priest of Amun, and his wife Tasenirit. At the time of her death in about 660 BC, at the end of the 25th Dynasty, she was married, and had been the mistress of a great house in Thebes. An ornamental cape of faience beads was placed across her chest. The fine linen wrappings were much admired when they were unwrapped in Belfast. A contemporary account says: "The hair was in excellent preservation, being very fine, about 3½ inches long, forming ringlets like those of children, and of a deep auburn shade." Professor Rosalie David from the University of Manchester said: "Research undertaken 10 years ago showed that her auburn hair was deliberately curled and styled. This must have been a very important part of her identity as she spurned the typical shaven-headed style."

Takabuti is now the star exhibit of the Ulster Museum in Belfast. The new research revealed that her DNA (genetic footprint H4a1) was more genetically similar to Europeans than to modern Egyptian populations. "The surprising and important discovery of her European heritage throws some fascinating light on a significant turning-point in Egypt's history," said Prof David. Takabuti had an extra tooth (33 instead of 32) something that only occurs in 0.02% of the population – and





an extra vertebra, which only occurs in 2% of the population. Most dramatically, she was stabbed in the upper back near her left shoulder. "This almost certainly caused her rapid death," said retired orthopædic surgeon Dr Robert Loynes. "However, the CT scan also reveals unusual and rare features of her embalming process."

Her heart, previously thought to have been missing, was found to be intact and perfectly preserved. The mysterious object in her body cavity, at one time identified as her heart, was in fact material used to pack the knife wound. Dr Greer Ramsey, Curator of Archæology at National Museums (Northern Ireland) said: "The significance of confirming Takabuti's heart is present cannot be underestimated [he meant overestimated], as in ancient Egypt this organ was removed in the afterlife and

weighed to decide whether or not the person had led a good life. If it was too heavy it was eaten by the demon Ammit and your journey to the afterlife would fail." We'll probably never know why her heart was not removed for assessment or indeed why she was stabbed to death. Report by University of Manchester, 27 Jan 2020.

#### **SAINT'S RELICS FOUND**

The fragmentary skeleton of Saint Eanswythe, patron saint of Folkestone in Kent, has almost certainly been identified, and are the only surviving remains of a member of the Kentish royal house. She was the daughter of King Eadbald of Kent (616?-640), possibly the present Queen's great<sup>40</sup> grandfather. Eanswythe is believed to have founded and became abbess of the Benedictine Folkestone Priory, England's first nunnery, in about 660. She was the granddaughter of Bertha, a Christian queen of Kent who, along with St Augustine, was arguably the key individual responsible for helping to convert Anglo-Saxon England to Christianity. Eanswythe died in her late teens or very early 20s, possibly from bubonic plague. Her bones were transferred to a new church in 1138, traditionally on 12 September, which became her Feast Day. She was credited with at least five miracles: she made water run uphill (a story probably developed in order to explain an optical illusion which seemed to show a local aqueduct channelling water up a gradient); she resurrected a dead goose that had been stolen and eaten; and lengthened a wooden beam to construct a church by

calling on Christ to help when a pagan king and his gods had failed to lengthen it. After her death, her ghost allegedly cured a man suffering from leprosy or some other skin disease.

In 1535, the prior of Folkestone (or some of his monks) hid a lead box containing her relics in the church wall beside the altar to protect them from Protestant zealots. The hiding place was forgotten until workmen engaged in modernising the church stumbled across the box in 1885. As there was no way of confirming their identity, the bones – about 50 per cent of a complete skeleton - were stashed away in a specially constructed wall niche and once again began to fade from memory. Scientific investigation this year has shown that the individual was almost certainly female, aged between 17 and 21, and had died in the mid-seventh century. Her teeth showed virtually no pre-death scratches on her tooth enamel, suggesting she had consumed relatively little coarse food. There were no signs of malnutrition, so she was probably a person of high status. The next steps will include DNA analysis. independent. co.uk, Guardian, 7 Mar 2020.

#### **RELIC CENTRAL**

This is a story of numinous objects long vanished, and so could be classified as "virtual archæology". Battle Abbey in East Sussex, built to commemorate the Battle of Hastings, is now an atmospheric ruin, but was once one of the most abundantly endowed religious establishments in England. Its relics were the most prestigious given to any abbey, more significant even than those at Westminster Abbey. An early 15th century manuscript listing the relics, kept at the Huntingdon Library in California, has been analysed and translated for the first time by Michael Carter, an English Heritage historian. It lists 175 individual relics, many given by the abbey's founder, William the Conqueror, to atone for the horrific bloodshed of 1066. William "knew that unless he made atonement for this and served the penances imposed on him, he was going to go to Hell," said Mr Carter.

Many Battle Abbey relics were associated with the story of Christmas. They included objects purporting to be from the ground, swaddling and manger where Jesus was born and (of course) wood from the cross on which he was crucified. There was also a rock used to stone Saint Stephen, whose feast day is Boxing Day, and bones of several of the Holy Innocents killed on the orders of King Herod, a massacre commemorated in the West on 28 December. Saint Nicholas, the original Santa Claus, was represented by a finger bone and fragments from his napkin and hair shirt. In 1200 King John gave a relic of the Holy Sepulchre (Christ's tomb) and a portrait of the True Cross, both collected by







**TOP**: The 'Finding Eanswythe' team with what are almost certainly the bones of the seventh-century Kentish saint. **ABOVE LEFT**: Cleaning skeletons during the 1937 excavations at Maiden Castle, Dorset. **ABOVE RIGHT**: Sir Mortimer Wheeler, seen at his desk holding a Roman pot.

his bloodthirsty brother Richard the Lionheart, when on crusade in the Holy Land.

Presumably, all these wonderful objects were looted during the dissolution of the monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII. Were they all destroyed, or could some still be knocking around in an attic or shed somewhere? *Guardian*, 18 Dec 2019.

#### FICTIONAL MASSACRE

The celebrated archæologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler had a flair for storytelling, and told a cracker at the height of World War II. After digging up some skeletons in Dorset's Maiden Castle during an excavation in 1936-37, his 1943 report conjured up one of Britain's most dramatic and horrific battles: an assault on the Ancient British fortress in AD 43 by a Roman legion led by future emperor Vespasian, leading to a massacre. He described the burials as a "war cemetery", and claimed the fallen had been hurriedly buried – some with terrible injuries, including arrows through the centre of the skull. He wrote that he found "skeletons in tragic profusion, displaying the marks of

battle and making actual one of the bestknown events in British history: the Roman conquest."

However, according to Dr Miles Russell, Professor of Archæology at Bournemouth University, writing in the Oxford Journal of Archæology: "Most archæologists know there is absolutely no evidence for such a 'great battle' at Maiden Castle, a site which in any case had been largely abandoned a century before the arrival of Rome... The account of a furious but futile defence of property, family and land by the local tribe of the Durotriges, leading eventually to their slaughter or enslavement, is undeniably powerful and remains one of the more potent stories relating to the demise of British prehistory." Studies show that the idea the bodies were dumped hastily in the graves was false; in fact they were carefully laid in position. Although 38 of the 52 bodies found had died violent deaths, there was a great variation in date ranging from 100 BC to AD 50 "suggesting the population had lived through multiple periods of stress, competition and conflict". D.Mail, 25 Dec 2019.

"When books are burned, men are burned" – Heine, *Almansor*, 1821, inspired by fiery passages in Milton's *Areopagitica*.

(General surveys include two entitled Burning Books, by Haig Bosmajian and Matthew Fishburn, both in 2008, and Kenneth Baker's On the Burning of Books: How Flames Fail to Destroy the Written Word, 2016. More ancient specifics in FH Cramer, 'Book Burning and Censorship in Ancient Rome', Journal of the History of Ideas 6, 1945, pp.157-96 – online – and Judith Herrin, 'Book Burning as Purification in Early Byzantium,' ch16 in Margins and Metropolis: Authority across the Byzantine Empire, 2013)

Despite its slogan of *Parrhesia* ('Free Speech', prefiguring the American First Amendment), the Athenian democracy was always suspicious of individuals promoting religious controversy. Hence, the bibliocide that befell Protagoras's (5th cent. BC) agnostic tract *On the Gods*, ordered by the authorities to be burned in the Agora (Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, bk1 ch23 para6), Protagoras himself being exiled for good measure.

Roman book-burning had a symmetrical history, being associated with its last king, first emperor, and its top general in late antiquity. Various sources (e.g. Pliny, *Natural History*, bk13 ch27 para88) say the Sibyl of Cumæ offered to sell him nine volumes of her collected prophecies. He refused. She burned three volumes, reoffered the rest at the same price. Another refusal. Three more were burned, the survivors re-presented, price unchanged. Tarquinius gave in – what a double-glazing saleswoman she would have made...

These volumes later – there had been an attempted burning in 186 BC – perished by accidental fire in the Temple of Jupiter (83 BC). Somewhat dubious (Tacitus, *Annals*, bk6 ch12) replacement copies were acquired. When Augustus (Suetonius, ch31) consigned 2,000 volumes of pontifical texts to the flames, these Sibylline ones were ostentatiously spared.

In 408, Flavius Stilicho ("Last of the Roman generals" – Gibbon), ordered them destroyed (Rutilius Namatianus (*On the Return*, bk2 vv51-60). His precise motive is unknown. Perhaps he had divined a fateful prophecy for himself? If so, they were bang on – Stilicho was executed later that year.

Augustus's reign also saw the first Roman writer and his books martyred – detailed account with references and



bibliography in Cramer. Historian-orator Titus Labienus excoriated Roman society so furiously that he was nicknamed 'Rabienus' ('The Mad One'). Around AD 6-8, the emperor's ever-tightening censorial noose fastened upon him and his works, the latter delivered to the stake. Labienus committed suicide, refusing permission to cremate his body, that it be spared the fate of his books, an obviously symbolic message to his persecutor.

A rival orator, Cassius Severus, was so moved by this that he also killed himself, proclaiming that, if they wanted to destroy Labienus's works, they would have also to burn him alive since he knew them by heart - shades of Ray Bradbury's book memorisers. In AD 25, under Tiberius, the historian Cremutius Cordus (Tacitus, Annals, bk4 chs34-5) was arraigned "on an unprecedented charge" of writing a treasonable Roman history in which the Cæsarcides Brutus and Cassius were extolled. After the Senate ordered its burning, Cordus starved himself to death. However, Tacitus says friends hid some copies, also deriding "the stupidity of people who think today's authority can destroy tomorrow's memories" – a timeless remark.

Surprisingly, it was – of all people – Caligula, who de-banned the books of Cordus, Labienus, and Severus, saying that all events should stay on record for all time – not something that has benefited this emperor's reputation.

Recording the conflagration (AD 59) of Fabricius Veiento's satires on priests and

senators – you'd have thought Nero would have enjoyed these – Tacitus (*Annals*, bk14 ch50) adds another eternal observation: "These books were much sought after when banned; after their revival, they were ignored" – Forbidden Fruit and all that...

"Books have their destinies" is a slogan from Terentianus Maurus to Umberto Eco. Numerous ancient book-burnings are on record. On the religious side, pagans and Christians are equally guilty, the latter sparing neither classical texts nor 'heretical' ones. Emperor Diocletian (AD 302) was both last persecutor of Christians and first to order burning their literature. When a Roman soldier mockingly burned a Torah (c. AD 50), rioting was only averted when his commander had him beheaded. Under Hadrian (117-38), a Jewish rabbi and a Torah were simultaneously incinerated. A key work of Epicurus was burned by the religious charlatan Alexander (cf. Steve Moore, FT27:46-52), being opposed by the latter's followers in an unlikely alliance with Christians.

Wikipedia's brobdingnagian list of book burnings managed to overlook Cordus, Labienus, Severus, and Veiento. Weirder yet, it leaves out the best-known story, that of the destruction of the great library at Alexandria. Actually, there had been two previous accidental burnings, associated with Julius Cæsar (48 BC) and Emperor Aurelian (270-75) before Caliph Omar (642) ordered a mass bibliocide, proclaiming: "If these books agree with the Koran, we don't need them; if they disagree, we don't want them."

Happily, this is probably not true; cf. L Canfora, The Vanished Library (1990) for full analysis. Sources for this episode are centuries later, and stories of libraries burnt by accident or design go back to Assyrian and Old Testament times. Destruction of books at Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade (1204) is better attested. Indeed, Omar's literary crime - contrary to the usual mediæval Arab venerating preservation of classical texts (another strike against the Daesh perversion of Islam) - has been questioned ever since Edward Gibbon, who (DFRE, ch51) began his demolition of the story with "For my own part, I am strongly tempted to deny both the fact and its consequences..."

"Everybody who is attacking something is sailing on a windmill, while denouncing merry-go-rounds" – Fort, *Books*, p711



WHAT WAS THAT?

A flaming object seen over Cambridgeshire, baffling bangs heard in Coventry and night-time noises in Edmonton, Canada...



ABOVE: The strange "flaming object" photographed in the Cambridgeshire skies.

#### **CAMBRIDGESHIRE'S FIRE** IN THE SKY

A "very big flaming object" was seen spiralling through the sky above Cambridgeshire in April. Witness Gerry Underwood, 55, spotted the mysterious object at around 8pm from outside his canal boat in Stretham. "It looked like a very thick chemtrail to start with," he explained. "It looked like a short, skinny cloud. It wasn't moving quickly at all. I'm pretty sure it wasn't a meteorite, because they are gone in seconds. We have seen hundreds of shooting stars, but this definitely wasn't that either."

Mr Underwood says he ob-

served the enigmatic phenomenon for between 10 and 20 minutes as it slowly spiralled down. "It started to glow orange. There were flames coming out of the back of it as well. It was really unusual." He took photographs as it fell, leaving a huge trail behind as it descended into the distance towards Huntingdon, disappearing behind some trees. "The sheer size of it is what's got me," he added. "When you look at the pictures, they show the trees in the foreground and it's way beyond that - it was very big. It landed beyond the horizon, that's how big it was - we couldn't see it land." A Chinese lantern, the cause of

several supposed UFO sightings, was mooted as a potential culprit, but BUFORA's Heather Dixon suggested the object was an aircraft contrail: "Being illuminated by the setting Sun would give it the dramatic, burning, red appearance. The 20 minute timescale for this would also support the idea this was a contrail. Something like a Chinese lantern would burn out much more quickly and fireball meteors only last a second or two." thesun.co.uk, dailymail. com, 17 Apr 2020.

#### **COVENTRY'S MYSTERY BANGS**

"Loud bangs", an "explosion", and a "massive flash" were all reported on social media by Coventry residents in November 2019. People in the north of the city were woken up in the early hours by what one witness described as a "massive bang", that was louder than a firework. Rooms were lit up by flashing lights, and bedroom lights reportedly dimmed at the same time.

Sonic booms from planes flying overhead have previously been the cause of unexplained loud bangs, but Ministry of Defence officials denied they had been conducting any operations in the area. Eleven months earlier, Coventry and Nuneaton residents reported hearing similar mystery noises, described variously as "an enormous bang", "a low drone", "a booming noise" and "a strange rumbling", with the night sky reportedly "flashing red". coventrytelegraph.net, 9 Dec 2018; Warwickshire Telegraph, 9 Nov 2019. See also FT323:4, 329:4.

#### **EDMONTON'S MIDNIGHT** WHINE

For several weeks, residents of central Edmonton, Canada, have been reporting a loud, highpitched noise. The shrill sound, described as an "electric horn" or alarm, is unpredictable, having been heard at various times of the day and night. One resident heard it while out for an early-morning dog walk with

her husband. Another local living six blocks away reported hearing it commence at 10pm, disappear after five minutes, then start up again. Some nights, he said, he doesn't hear it at all, while on other nights it prevents him from sleeping. On one occasion it woke him up at 3.40am.

The sound has persisted for weeks or months. A CBC reporter visited the area one evening and confirmed the noise is alarmingly loud, traversing blocks and confusing pedestrians and drivers. A spokeswoman for the City of Edmonton authority confirmed that at least three complaints had been lodged, and that they are investigating the source of the noise. Several residents have themselves gone looking for its origin but have been unable to trace it. One went on a midnight bike ride trying to pinpoint the source; he believes it was emanating from the roof of a new 27-storey apartment building. A real estate company who own the building have said they are conducting their own investigation.

An engineer who works for a company specialising in noise vibration and acoustics listened to multiple recordings of the sound. He said vacuum and construction trucks may cause similar noises, but also suggested it may be due to wind interacting with a particular building's design. Wind blowing on perforated railings or other lightweight architectural features on a tall tower, for example, causes them to vibrate at a specific frequency. He suggests that the noise has been heard more frequently at night because daytime traffic noise masks it. "Once it gets moving, if there's no damping or rubber components or some sort of softer material to absorb some of that energy," he said, "the wind has to stop blowing or change the direction in order for that panel to stop moving." cbc.ca, 6 May 2020. For more mysterious sounds, see FT341:22-2, 371:24-25, 391:17.



## The sense of a presence

ALAN MURDIE explores varied accounts of phantom presences both friendly and malevolent





ABOVE: Haunted hotels? People have reported sensing spectral presences at the Penrallt Hotel in Aberforth and the George & Abbotsford Hotel in Melrose.

The feeling of being in the company of an invisible presence is one of the most commonly reported ghostly experiences. It also remains one of the least investigated by ghost hunters.

Many reports from occupiers of haunted houses mention a "sensation of a presence", a strange "atmosphere" or "a feeling of being watched". The sensed presence often features on lists of more tangible phenomena that contradict the findings of "normal science", recorded together with claims of temperature variations, chilly breezes, the disturbance of bedclothes and objects, glowing lights, doors opening and shutting themselves, footsteps, apparitions and all the other effects which constitute the hallmarks of a haunted site.

To cite two recent examples from the UK: "Ghostly shadows" flitting through its hall, doors slamming, wardrobe doors flying open at night and the feeling of "a presence" all come from staff and guests at the Penrallt Hotel, Aberforth, near Cardigan Bay in Wales. Dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this family-run hotel was visited in the summer of 2019 by members of Cymru Paranormal

#### Her hair was pulled back so sharply that she was thrown against the table behind her

Investigations and Research before reopening last August following refurbishment.

Cymru Paranormal claims success recording unexplained noises by the bar, a "movement" in the dining room and hearing the sound of running water with no obvious source. They state "experiences of the team, along with the one scientific piece of evidence which remains unexplainable" tend to suggest "some sort of paranormal activity going on at the location". ('Something really does go bump in the night at the Penrallt Hotel in Aberporth!' *Tivy Advertiser*, 25 Oct 2019).

Just over six months later, and over 300 miles away in Scotland, the owner and staff of the George & Abbotsford Hotel in Melrose also requested a ghost investigation.

Staff complained of lights being switched on and off and physical assaults by an invisible presence. An investigation of sorts was duly supplied by UK Ghost Nights, an entertainment company that charges fees for services appearing to be a mixture of ghost hunt, séance and diverting night out. Joining them was Andrew McQuarrie an editor with the *Border Telegraph*.

Unfortunately, at least as Mr McQuarrie describes proceedings, the UK Ghost Nights involvement was heavy on showmanship, with much solemn brandishing of copper dowsing rods, but light on any scientific scrutiny or study of the patterns of experience within the building. While Andrew McQuarrie clearly remained unconvinced at the efforts of a UK Ghost Nights employee "trying to channel my inner Bill Murray" as he put it, he admits finding stories told by hotel owner Mrs Dawn Barrett and her head chef Kailee Reidie 'compelling'.

Ms Reidie, 22, described an alarming incident, ascribed to the aggressive spirit of "John... supposedly a grouchy ex-chef". One evening, as Ms Reidie was alone in the kitchen, turning on the fryer, her hair was pulled back so sharply that she was thrown

against the table behind her. She stated: "I was in shock because I knew he [John] was there, but I'm not a big believer in ghosts... I've never seen John – it's just a feeling."

Mr McQuarrie found "a sense of foreboding in some areas of the building – not least the cellar and the attic," though such places can often seem gloomy and claustrophobic, regardless of any haunting.

Pick up almost any book on haunted places published in the last 60 years and you will find similar stories. Diverse places are described as 'uncanny', 'weird', 'spooky' and so on, descriptions often straying into the poetic. John Harries wrote of Glencoe, "whatever the time or season, if, in this valley of angry rock and torrential streams, the ghost hunter does not find himself in the presence of vengeful phantoms, he lacks the very rudiments of the sensitivity for the most persuasive of psychic experiences." (*The Ghost Hunter's Roadbook* (1968).

More commonly, the sensation of a presence may occur when a person is alone in a building, including their own home, as well as in the open air. Sometimes the impression may be identified as related to a living person not physically present or to someone actually deceased. Dr Dewey Rees studied hallucinations experienced by the bereaved. Experiences of presences often happened spontaneously to widows and widowers, following the death of a spouse (*British Medical Journal*, 3 Oct 1971). Alternatively, the percipient senses an anonymous personality, or even a nonhuman entity.

Though often omitted from surveys of ghostly encounters, it is a common and cross-cultural experience. Dr Erlendur Haraldsson found a sensed presence ranks highly among ghostly manifestations in Iceland, often only exceeded by visual experiences (see The Departed Among the Living: An Investigative Study of Afterlife Encounters (2012) and also Apparitions (1975) by Celia Green and Charles McCreery). As often as not, the percipient encounters a more nebulous feeling, perceived as an impression of a malaise or oppression, leading to a conviction that an unspecified 'something' is wrong with a house or location.

A prime difficulty with analysing reports is that the sense of a presence crosses the boundary into what, in other contexts, is interpreted as a spiritual, mystical and religious experience, saturated with a host of cultural and personal meanings.

William James, one of the founders of modern psychology, confessed in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) that he hardly knew where to begin with it, announcing: "No definite conclusion can be come to until more definite data are obtained". The Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre has collected

thousands of cases over many years, but a paradigm for understanding remains elusive.

A sign of just how little progress has been made in more than a century is shown by its specific omission from a leading 21<sup>st</sup> century study, *Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence* (2016) by Stanley Krippner and Ertzel Cardena, who consider "that there is not a substantial enough research literature relating to it". Consequently, we are left principally with only the descriptions supplied in personal testimonies.

In 1897 an intriguing description was provided by Harold Sanders, a butler at the notoriously haunted Ballechin House in Perthshire (see **FT345:18-20**). A few minutes prior to hearing strange noises Sanders felt a "peculiar sensation" that he compared to "suddenly entering an ice house, and a feeling that someone was present and about to speak to me" (In *The Alleged Haunting of B—— House* (1900) by Ada Goodrich-Freer and John, Marquess of Bute).

In the 1950s a professor of zoology purchased a mews flat which had formerly been a studio, at Wonersh, Surrey, to carry out his studies. After a few months he was forced to vacate the property because of its atmosphere. He told Andrew Green: "The feeling was really diabolical, it was getting so bad that I was developing suicidal tendencies. I had to get out." (Our Haunted Kingdom, 1973).

Writer Joan Forman made no claim to possessing psychic abilities, but found herself sensitive to atmospheres when exploring a number of haunted locations in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s. Her first encounter with a malevolent presence took place when visiting an (unidentified)

church in a north Norfolk hamlet "beyond Colney" in the autumn of 1971. Both she and a friend found the ambience so intensely oppressive and "evil", they left the building. Returning to their car, they found a green, glutinous substance spattered over the vehicle for which they had no explanation.

Going up to a haunted room on the first floor of an Oxfam shop in Magdalen Street, Norwich, in early 1973, Joan Forman experienced "a feeling of physical disturbance". She described it in Haunted East Anglia (1974): "At first mild, it intensified as we climbed the stairs and entered the corridor leading to the front office". By the time she reached the door, "the sensation was precise, intense and concentrated", proving "overpoweringly strong" inside the room itself. Describing the effect upon herself, she stated how the feeling, "seems first to affect the middle of one's body, the stomach tightens or feels queasy, as in a fear reaction. There is a feeling... of *oppression* on the body's surface, as though the atmosphere had gained additional weight."

She describes encountering something similar at Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh in 1986, finding "Rizzio's Room" (where David Rizzio, lover of Mary Queen of Scots, was murdered on 9 March 1566) quite impossible to stay in. She identified a sense of horror permeating the room, concentrated on the left-hand side near the entrance door. "The sensation is so intense that it almost seems to have weight – as though the air was thicker at that spot." (Haunted Royal Homes, 1987).

I find this description interesting. It matches how I would best describe a sensation I have felt myself at several



ABOVE: The haunted Oxfam on Magdalene Road, Norwich, is now the SirPlus Trading shop.

## **GHOSTWATCH**

haunted sites visited over the years. The air seems to be too thick or condensed at certain points. The problem is that one cannot be sure with such impressions, owing to their typically unique and essentially private nature.

My own most striking experience with a presence occurred on the night of 6-7 December 1997, at an isolated printing shop in a converted farm building near an ancient site in Kent. Employees were troubled by noises, an unpleasant atmosphere and shadowy figures glimpsed passing outside in the yard of the building during daylight hours. They became increasingly uneasy about working at the rather remote location, and one threatened to resign. I was requested to attend after the owner, a lady in her early 40s, had called in two experienced ghost investigators well known to me. One was a tough former soldier and devout Catholic, the other a successful lady journalist possessing pronounced psychic sensitivity. In turn, they asked me along, viewing me as something of a sceptic towards their impressions obtained at a previous visit that this haunting might involve "something nasty".

Our visit took place on a Saturday evening, accompanied by the owner who admitted having become nervous herself about staying inside the building alone. The unit lay along a deserted minor road, running through thick woods. Being used to the East Anglian countryside at night, I did

not find this troubling. It was a crisp and dry evening, and not cold for the season. I experienced no conscious sense of unease. If anything, my mood was buoyant and engaged, even one of pleasant expectation. This changed upon arriving at the premises and setting foot inside. Immediately upon entering, I was struck by an intensely unpleasant and unsettling atmosphere. It felt like stepping inside a block of intense hostility that filled the room.

My sensations were at odds with the actual scene presenting itself, starkly illuminated by bright electric lights. Looking over the idle machinery with stacks of halfcompleted printing jobs piled around them, it all looked a little chaotic and untidy, dingy in places, but hardly menacing. Yet the feeling of hostility in the air was acute. I can only compare it to the sensations that you may experience when trying to concentrate on some task at the same time as being exposed to a loud, piercing, high-pitched noise like a car alarm. Except here, both premises and surrounding grounds and woodland were silent.

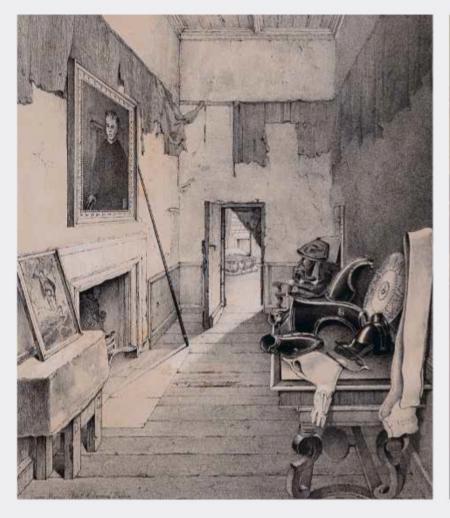
Perhaps significantly, I also encountered this feeling immediately outside the building. Going out alone into the well-lit front yard, where storage sheds and the toilet and washing facilities were situated, proved markedly unpleasant. Here it seemed more dynamic; I had the eerie and unsettling feeling of being watched and then trailed, as if followed by someone intent on creeping up on me from behind. I was

glad to return inside, where the unpleasant atmosphere slowly dispersed.

Over the next four hours, we explored the site, inside and out, while the owner remained in one small office doing paperwork. We conducted several static periods of silent observation with the lights kept on (nobody was keen to sit in complete darkness). We witnessed nothing unusual.

The one objective and unexplained event of the night occurred there at 12.30am. A large can of aerosol spray containing glue used for photographs suddenly fell off a work bench and struck the floor loudly – rather purposefully it seemed. We identified no obvious explanation for this (I actually found it interesting and not alarming). However, the lady sensitive reported hearing a strange groan and found the atmosphere increasingly uncomfortable. She was convinced that 'it' was back, whatever 'it' was, and that it was best to leave. Respecting her feelings, and not with much regret, we departed. I have not encountered a site with such a distinctly unpleasant atmosphere before or since.

There is no agreed consensus or hypothesis amongst psychical researchers as to the cause of such experiences, reflected in our division of opinion on the night. My companions thought of discarnate activity, while I was inclined at the time to think in terms of auto-suggestion or electromagnetic pollution. I was aware of research by Dr Michael Persinger in Canada and Albert Budden in the UK,





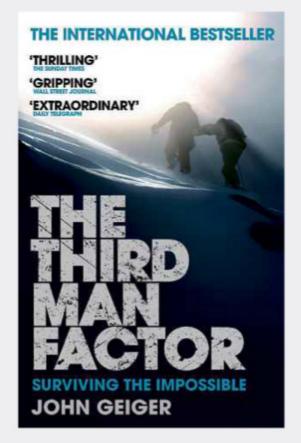
ABOVE LEFT: The room in Holyrood Palace where David Rizzio, the lover of Mary, Queen of Scots, was murdered in 1566. ABOVE RIGHT: Writer Joan Forman identified a sense of horror permeating the room, especially near the door. She experienced something similar in the upstairs office of the Norwich Oxfam.



both promoting theories that electrical or electromagnetic stimulation of the brain produced haunting sensations. (CM Cook and MA Persinger: 'Experimental induction of the "sensed presence" in normal subjects and an Exceptional Subject' in Perceptual and Motor Skills 77 (1997), pp.1299-1308; *Allergies and Aliens* (1995) by Albert Budden).

Not until the summer of the following year, 1998, did the late Vic Tandy propose his hypothesis that low levels of infrasound trigger uncomfortable sensations in confined spaces, duly interpreted as ghostly presences (see **FT301:52-53**). This theory accumulated a substantial following for a time, attracting efforts at experimental testing with the creation of the 'Haunt Project' by researchers at Goldsmith College, London. It involved creating an artificial 'haunted' room in which volunteers were exposed to infrasound, complex electromagnetic fields, singly or in combination (see 'The "Haunt" Project: An attempt to build a "haunted" room by manipulating complex electromagnetic fields and infrasound' by Christopher C French, Usman Haque, Rosie Bunton-Stasyshyn & Rob Davis (2009) Cortex 45, pp.619-29). Positive results were reported, although the methodology, measurements and the infrasound hypothesis itself have been disputed. Moreover, infrasound was postulated as operating in enclosed spaces, failing to account for experiences in the open air (see: 'Infrasound and the Paranormal' (2012) by Steve Parsons in Journal of the SPR v.76, pp.155-175).

Alternative explanations, favoured by an earlier generation of anomalous psychologists, looked to medicine and psychiatry, drawing parallels with symptoms of schizophrenia and epilepsy, in which



#### The friendly presence seemed so real to him he offered it a share of Kendal mint cake

sufferers feel an alien presence nearby. Such medicalisation of experience, and fears of being diagnosed as delusional (or simply labelled lonely and socially isolated), may have discouraged people from reporting their experiences.

However, a rebuttal to accusations of mental affliction comes from widespread accounts offered by individuals in top physical and mental condition, for example, explorers, soldiers, athletes and mountaineers (See The Psychology of Anomalous Experience, 1972, by Graham Reed). Mountaineer Ralph Izzard in The Innocents on Everest (1954) wrote: "Many of us, and not only the hypersensitive, have felt the sense of a 'presence' at high and desolate altitudes... Nine times out of ten this 'presence' is felt to be malevolent rather than benevolent".

In other cases, the presence proves helpful and sustaining. After narrowly missing reaching the summit of Mount Everest in 1933, Frank Smythe felt himself accompanied by a friendly presence that seemed so real to him he offered it a share of Kendal mint cake. The sense of presence felt by some mountaineers may result from moving automatically in extreme fatigue; the sense of being guided may arise from perceiving oneself moving without being conscious of controlling one's own movements, or from heightened reactions in external natural stimuli like draughts,

**LEFT**: Frank Smythe felt a phantom presence when approaching the summit of Everest in 1933. Such experiences have been dubbed the 'Third Man' factor by author John Geiger.

cloud shadows and echoes, themselves startling in otherwise relatively silent and monotonous environments.

Notably, these experiences occur with sufficient frequency that US author John Geiger has gathered an extensive collection. Dubbing such phantoms the 'Third Man' experience, he has written a fascinating book, The Third Man Factor: Surviving the Impossible (2013), devoted to the phenomenon.

Yachtsman Joshua Slocum (1844c.1909), who made the first solo voyage around the globe, claimed once being aided by a ghostly helmsman (see FT354:49). Following a perilous 16-day crossing of the Antarctic seas in an open boat to South Georgia, Ernest Shackleton wrote that during a long march over the mountainous and glacial island, "it seemed to me often that we were four, not three... Afterwards Worsley and Crean [his living human companions] each confessed to 'a curious feeling on the march that there was another person with us" (in South, 1919). Aviator Charles Lindbergh claimed ghostly presences advised him while making the first transatlantic flight in 1927. Geiger looks to evolutionary theory as a possible solution, advocating a hereditary survival mechanism hard-wired into human neurophysiology.

This is all deeply interesting, but in my view a theory inadequate to encompass the range of experiences occurring at haunted sites and their accompanying phenomena. Could it be that undergoing extreme physical hardship and privations, effectively bringing the body closer to physical death, results in a liminal condition where the boundary between this life and another dimension becomes permeable, as is presumed to occur at haunted sites? Effectively, does the body itself become haunted? Parallels may be drawn with near-death experiences.

As Renee Heynes stated in *The Hidden* Springs (1961): "The thesis that such intuitions of presence must always be illusory because they sometimes arise from physical stimuli originating either outside or inside the body is surely no more reasonable than the argument that the normal working of the senses cannot be trusted because drunkenness, or a high temperature, can produce hallucinations."

If so, possible answers may better be sought in transpersonal psychology and parapsychology rather than anomalous psychology. As will be obvious, encountering a presence after walking up one flight of stairs in an Oxfam shop in Norwich is hardly comparable to climbing Everest.

MEDICAL BAG | Transplant recipient's hands turn female, Spanish babies grow strangely hairy, and a Thai man's sexual misadventure leaves him with a rotten penis



ABOVE: Shreya Siddanagowder gestures with her large 'male' hands, more than two years after undergoing transplant surgery.

#### ARMS AND THE WOMAN

A young Indian woman who lost both her hands in a 2016 bus accident was given transplants using limbs from a male donor. 18-year-old Shreya Siddanagowder's arms were amputated below the elbow following the accident. In 2017 she underwent a 13-hour transplant operation, followed by 18 months of physical therapy to improve her ability to control her new arms and hands. Strangely, the skin colour of her new limbs, which had been darker because the male donor had a darker complexion, gradually lightened to more closely match Siddanagowder's own skin tone. In essence, her hands have become more 'feminine'. Her doctors believe the skin lightening may be because her body produces less melanin than that of her donor. Siddanagowder is thought to be the first woman to receive male hands in a transplant procedure. livescience.com, 13 Mar 2020.

#### WHITE POWDER ADDICT

Lisa Anderson, of Paignton, Devon, eats a 200g bottle of talcum powder every day. Ms Anderson, 44, estimates she

has spent around £8,000 on talc, insisting on Johnson's Baby Powder as "it has this nice soapy taste." Her unusual habit began 15 years ago when she became attracted to the smell while bathing and drying her baby son. "I wake up four times in the night as my body just craves it," she said. Doctors believe the motherof-five has Pica syndrome, a compulsion to eat material with no significant nutritional value. Other Pica sufferers consume soil, paint, hair, glass, or other non-nutritional substances. Eating talcum powder can lead to breathing difficulties, eye irritation, chest pains, lung failure, and may increase the risk of cancer. For more strange diets, see FT190:24, 278:5, 288:10-11, 315:24, 330:8-9, 362:6, 378:15. D.Mirror; Metro, 7 Jan *2020*.

#### **PHANTOM PHONES**

Mental health specialists have identified a new psychological phenomenon; phantom phone syndrome (PPS). With what is sometimes referred to as "ringxiety" or "vibranxiety", smartphone and smartwatch users have become so finelyattuned to the signal indicating a new message that they have begun to feel their devices vibrate when they are not actually doing so. Some even detect a buzz when their phones have been put away.

Psychologist Michelle Drouin of Purdue University, who has both studied and experienced the phenomenon, suggests people should temporarily distance themselves from their gadgets, removing smartwatches and leaving smartphones at home. "The longer you're away from your device, the more likely you won't experience these false signals," she says. Rather than being classified as hallucination and a mental disorder, researchers instead say PPS is associated with a social mediadriven anxiety or fear of missing out (so-called FOMO).

Geophysics graduate Celeste Labedz, 25, says that when she keeps her smartphone in her back pocket, she senses phantom vibrations all day. "It's the worst," she explains. "It's annoying because I think I'm popular, and I'm getting messages, but I'm not." A related condition, nomophobia, refers to feelings of terror at not having

a working phone. A study at an Iranian university found approximately 50 per cent of a body of 400 medical students experienced PPS, either perceiving non-existent new message alerts or hearing their phone ring when it wasn't.

The syndrome is thought to be related to phantom limb syndrome, the well-known phenomenon by which persons with an amputated limb still feel pain or other sensation where the limb once was. Dr Robert Rosenberger, a Georgia Institute of Technology philosopher who studies how technology shapes human experience, has himself felt his phone buzz beside him even when it was elsewhere. He described it as "unsettling", but was relieved to learn that others experienced the same thing. "I had written it off as something that was weird and specific to me, but it's normal," he says. "It's part of the normal experience of having a phone." Wall Street Journal, 20 Dec 2019.

#### **DEAD OF OLD AGE AT EIGHT**

A very rare genetic disease resulted in an eight-year-old Ukrainian girl dying of old age. Anna Sakidon suffered from Hutchinson-Gilford progeria syndrome, which only affects 160 people in the entire world. When she died, she weighed just 17lb (7.7kg) and had a biological age of 80. One year is equivalent to 10, with premature aging of the organs and bodily system. Anna suffered several strokes and died from multiple organ failure. S.Mirror, S.People, 16 Feb 2020.

#### THAI PENIS PERIL

A young Bangkok man attempting to gain sexual gratification with a two-inch (5cm) aluminium pipe later found his penis trapped inside the metal tube. Perhaps through embarrassment, he did not seek medical attention, but continued his daily life with his member still lodged in the pipe. After five days he called an ambulance, and medical staff worked on him for three hours with equipment usually used to cut rings from

fingers. Eventually he was freed, but unfortunately after the five days' confinement, irreparable damage had been done, with loss of blood supply causing 90 per cent of his penis to become rotten. There was no alternative but to amputate. Apparently the young man had done this many times before. But he won't be doing it again. forum.thaivisa.com, 14 Jan 2020.

#### **GOING GREY OVERNIGHT**

Numerous stories tell of people whose hair turned grey after a sudden shock. When French queen Marie Antoinette was seized by republicans during the French Revolution, her regal locks reputedly turned white overnight. Now, scientists have finally established that stress can indeed cause hair to suddenly lose its colour, by causing sympathetic nerves to release norepinephrine, which is then taken up by nearby pigment-regenerating stem cells. The chemical sends the cells into overdrive, their excess activity depleting their colour reservoir permanently. "After just a few days, all of the pigment-regenerating stem cells were lost," said Dr Ya-Chieh Hsu, associate professor of stem cell and regenerative biology at Harvard University and lead researcher of a new study published in *Nature*. "Once they're gone, you can't regenerate pigment anymore." Fight or flight responses are generally beneficial, but they also have the effect

of shutting down functions deemed non-essential. Most return in time, but some, like hair pigmentation, may be permanently damaged. *D.Telegraph*, 23 Jan 2020.

#### **SPAIN'S WEREWOLF KIDS**

At least 17 Spanish children began growing hair all over their bodies, after taking a mislabelled prescription medicine intended to treat heartburn, but which is actually used to treat hair loss. The Malaga-based Farmaquimica Sur laboratory had mistakenly labelled bottles of minoxidil (an anti-baldness medication) as omeprazole (a treatment for acid reflux). The lab distributed the wrongly labelled medicine to pharmacies throughout Spain. The Spanish dermatology association has reassured parents that the unwanted hair should begin to fall out around three months after the last dose. However, the mother of a 26-month-old girl has said that four months later, her child is still covered in hair on her face and other parts of her body. She believes the Spanish authorities are minimizing the significance of this health scandal. "Thank God that the symptom was as noticeable as excess hair," she said, adding that "if it had been a latent thing that was gradually affecting internal organs," she would have continued to administer the wrong drug. New York Times, 30 Aug 2019.



**ABOVE:** Hairy hands! A number of babies in Spain began growing hair all over their bodies after being given a mislabelled medicine intended to treat baldness.

## **MYTHCONCEPTIONS**

by Mat Coward

#### **250: BROKEN BONES**



#### The myth

Broken bones heal stronger: a grandparently piece of wisdom, this, given for the comfort of cast-encased juniors who've fallen from trees or spilled from bicycles. Look on the bright side, it says: you'll never break that particular bone again, because when it's better it'll be as tough as old iron.

#### The "truth"

A bone once broken does not heal stronger than it was before – it is no more or less likely to be broken in the future than it was in the past – but there is a reason, beyond unsupported hope, why people might think so. A mineral deposit known as a callus forms at the site of a fracture, temporarily holding the broken ends together while the bone is rebuilt. During this period, because the limb (or whatever) is demineralising while it's deliberately immobilised, the bit that's being mended is much stronger than the rest of the bone. But eventually the temporary bone is replaced by standard, permanent material, you begin exercising your damaged bits again, and everything goes back to normal. Apparently, studies have been done in which healed bones were "subjected to bending and twisting forces," and no difference in strength or frangibility was noted at the point where they had previously fractured.

#### **Sources**

www.nytimes.com/2010/10/19/health/19really.html; www.mcgill.ca/oss/article/did-you-know/broken-bones-grow-back-stronger-sort; www.bbc.com/future/article/20181005-five-myths-about-broken-bones

#### **Disclaimer**

No orthopædic surgeons were troubled in the writing of this column, which also did not involve any actual bones being "subjected to bending and twisting forces." So if any of it's questionable, please feel free to break it to us (gently or otherwise) on the letters pages.

#### **Mythchaser**

A repeat, prompted by current events. Years ago, we asked whether it was true, as claimed in Home Front histories, that the British habit of orderly queuing for shops and transport was created in WWII (or WWI). Can any passing social historian disprove this by means of an earlier citation?



## OF HEADS AND HORNS | Natural wonders, including two-headed snakes and goats, and a longhorn who really lives up to the name



ABOVE: Bucklehead, the West Texas longhorn steer, is seen with his owners, teenage siblings Leandro and Marceala Gonzales, who won him as a six-month-old in a raffle six years ago. BELOW: The two-headed baby snake born in Stewart Gatt's car. BOTTOM: Janus, the loveable two-headed goat who became a Facebook celebrity during his short life.

#### TWO-HEADED BABY SNAKE

An Australian snake catcher was called out by a Victoria resident who had reported a snake in his yard. Stewart Gatt, aka Stewy the Snake Catcher, trapped the female tiger snake in a bag and loaded it into his car, but was then surprised when the serpent gave birth to several babies one of which had two heads. Sadly, the two-headed baby was euthanised as it was thought unlikely to survive; but the rest were healthy, and were released into the wild with their mother. upi.com, 20 Mar 2020.

#### THE JANUS GOAT

A two-headed goat was an unexpected recent arrival on a Wisconsin farm. The baby goat, named Janus after the two-headed Roman deity, was born on 5 April and appeared healthy, despite his side-by-side twin mouths and four eyes. "He's a normal goat. We just have to help him," said Jocelyn Nueske, head of the Wittenberg goat farm. "We try to help him as much as we can, and give him a break when he gets tired." She said Janus had already proved popular among visitors to the farm's Facebook page.





Nueske, who has run the farm for six years, said she didn't even know it was possible for a goat to be born with two faces. "I've heard of two-headed cows, and lizards," she said, "but not a goat". Sadly, the now famous goat became ill and died in early May. "So many people were rooting for him," the farm wrote on Facebook. "He will surely be missed but is a reminder that though unexpected challenges may come into our lives, we can choose to face them with kindness! And kindness is contagious!" upi.com, 15 Apr; Wausa Daily Herald, 5 May 2020.

#### **EMOTIONAL MICE**

Researchers claim to have demonstrated that the facial expressions of mice show emotions just like humans. They fed sweet and sour solutions to the lab rodents, and believe a range of five emotions were displayed, from a 'joyful' expression after being given sugar, to a 'disgusted' face after being offered salt. The study claims to be able to measure "intensity and nature of an emotion" in milliseconds and compare with brain activity. Sun, 3 Apr 2020.

#### **LONGEST HORN**

Bucklehead, a West Texas longhorn steer, has entered Guinness World Records after his horn span was measured at 11ft 1.8in (3.4m). The previous record holder's horn span was a mere 10ft 7.4in (3.2m). Bucklehead's owners affix tennis balls on the tips of his horns to protect them when he's travelling inside his trailer. D. Telegraph, 20 Oct 2019.

#### **WEAPONISED PARROT**

A "malicious" pensioner who tormented her neighbours with a parrot was given a restraining order and suspended prison sentence after pleading guilty to criminal damage and harassment. Catherine Searle, 81, of Sevenoaks, Kent, repeatedly encouraged the parrot to perform by playing loud opera music, causing the bird to squawk in a "very loud, piercing" voice "in a continuous repertoire over and over". Ms Searle's neighbours were subjected to years of harassment, not limited to parrot disturbance. Dog excrement was thrown into their garden and grease smeared on their car bonnets. <i>, 28 Feb 2020.

## ALIEN ZOO NEWS FROM THE CRYPTOZOOLOGICAL GARDEN

KARL SHUKER greets a new snake, welcomes a UK return and ponders a marsupial mystery .....



#### STORKING A PLACE IN HISTORY

Last month, I reported how the common crane was re-establishing itself as a breeding bird in the UK after having previously died out here back in the 1600s [FT393:24]. Now I'm delighted to say that another tall, equally spectacular bird is attempting to do the same after an even longer absence. The last white storks, Ciconia ciconia, known to have nested here did so in 1416, at St Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh, since when the species has been but a rare non-breeding visitor to Britain from continental Europe – until last year, that is.

Founded in 2016 by a partnership of private landowners and nature conservation charities, the White Stork Project operates in three localities in Surrey and West Sussex, and using a series of injured storks from Poland that cannot fly far, it hopes to re-establish the species as a breeding bird here. Last year, one of its females plus an unringed, possibly wild stork visiting from the Continent paired up, built a nest in a tree within the Knepp Castle Estate, West Sussex, and laid some eggs, but tragically they failed to hatch. As all storks do, they then spent the winter in warmer, African climes, but returned to the same estate this spring and built a nest in a tree near the one they used last year. The female laid some more eggs and this time, in early May, they hatched! The White Stork Project is naturally delighted, and hopes that this event will herald the beginning of the breeding pair's stately species staking its muchdeserved place in Britain's natural history once more, the Project's aim being to restore a population of at least 50 breeding pairs in southern England by 2030. D.Mail, 30 April 2020; www. theguardian.com/environment/2020/ may/16/wild-white-storks-hatch-for-firsttime-in-hundreds-of-years.

#### IN TIZZY OVER TASSIE PIPE

A clay pipe made at least 190 years ago and recently sold at auction as an unwanted item by a bottle-collecting enthusiast - who found it in 2016 nestled between two old bottles dating from c.1830 dug up by him in a bottle dump near Launceston, Tasmania – is being hailed as the Holy Grail of Tasmanian archæology. Its bowl is decorated with a detailed depiction of the supposedly extinct thylacine or Tasmanian wolf *Thylacinus* cynocephalus, with the age of the pipe meaning that its Tassie portrait is one of the earliest known European illustrations of this unmistakable species, outwardly resembling a striped wolf but taxonomically a marsupial. The thylacine officially became extinct in 1936, but numerous unconfirmed eyewitness reports have been filed since then, giving hope that it may still survive here [see FT247:22, 290:21, 295:21, 319:19].

Manufactured before cigarettes were produced, clay pipes were often made in Europe and imported into Australia, but this one was created from Tasmanian river clay and was therefore made locally (possibly by a convict). This explains its very notable historical significance, enhanced by the thylacine - but that is not the only interesting motif. Inscribed upon its stem is a depiction of a bird resembling a kookaburra, which is puzzling because kookaburras didn't exist in Tasmania until 1902 (around 70 years *after* the pipe's creation), when specimens were introduced here from the Australian mainland. Various attempts have been made to explain this apparent chronological and zoogeographical anomaly. One suggestion is that whoever made the pipe had previously lived on or visited the mainland and had seen kookaburras

there, inspiring him when subsequently decorating the pipe in Tasmania. Another possibility is that the bird depicted is not a kookaburra but rather the Tasmanian kingfisher, a native species related to the kookaburra. Yet another thought is that the bird is merely generic, i.e. not meant to represent any real species, its resemblance to the kookaburra being entirely coincidental. Tassie specialist Dr Stephen Sleightholme, from the International Thylacine Specimen Database, was the pipe's successful bidder at auction, after which it was brought to scientific attention by Dr Darren Watton, principal archæologist with Southern Archæology. A paper formally documenting it is now due to be published. https:// archaeologynewsnetwork.blogspot. com/2020/05/rare-200-year-old-claypipe-depicting.html.

#### **SLITHERING FROM SLYTHERIN**

A Newly described Indian species of green pit viper is noteworthy not only for the vivid orange-red stripe visible on the side of its head in male specimens, but also for its interesting formal scientific name – *Trimeresurus salazar*, Salazar's pit viper. The team of researchers responsible for this memorable moniker drew their inspiration from JK Rowling's Harry Potter novels, and specifically from the character of Salazar Slytherin, founder of Slytherin House in Hogwarts, who was a parselmouth, i.e. someone gifted with the ability to understand and speak the language of snakes (parseltongue). Inhabiting the western lowlands of Arunachal Pradesh, this new species is clearly a wizard of a discovery, in every sense! www.independent. co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/ scientists-snake-harry-potter-salazarslytherin-hogwarts-a9477716.html.





ABOVE LEFT: The thylacine on the pipe's bowl. ABOVE RIGHT: The newly described Salazar's pit viper.

## **ART ATTACKS**

An unimpressed critic finds her thoughts made reality at a Mexico art fair, while a conceptual creator's top banana is wolfed down by a fellow artist





ABOVE: Gabriel Rico's piece was accidentally destroyed by art critic Avelina Lésper, who thought it was crap anyway. The museum director thought the incident "a tragedy", while others applauded Ms Lésper's intervention as a performance piece. BELOW: David Datuna (right) ate fellow artists Maurizio Cattelan's £91,300 banana as a gesture of respect.

#### **DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISM**

An art critic attending Mexico's premier art fair "accidentally broke" an installation worth \$20,000 (£16,000) when she placed a drink can near to the artwork to express her disdain. The piece, by artist Gabriel Rico, featured a sheet of glass with a stone, a football and other random objects suspended inside. "It was like the work heard my comment and felt what I thought of it," said critic Avelina Lésper. "The work shattered into pieces and collapsed and fell to the floor." Art museum director Alfonso Miranda described the incident as a "tragedy", while others have applauded the destruction as a performance piece. Ms Lésper suggested the gallery keep the shattered work on display "to show its evolution." <i>, 11 Feb 2020

#### **BANANA FOR ART'S SAKE**

A work of art on display in a Miami gallery disappeared when it was eaten by another artist.



"The work shattered into pieces and fell to the floor"

Comedian, by Italian conceptual artist Maurizio Cattelan, was composed of a banana taped to the gallery wall, and had previously been sold for \$120,000 (£91,300). Gallery owner



Emmanuel Perrotin said the banana symbolised global trade, and was an example of Cattelan's ability to turn ordinary objects into "vehicles of both delight and critique". Cattelan's previous work includes an 18-carat lavatory in Blenheim Palace, stolen within hours of its going on display, a sculpture of the Pope struck down by an asteroid (FT131:11), and a stuffed squirrel with a tiny revolver by

its side, apparently a suicide.

Entering the gallery, fellow artist David Datuna announced, "Art performance. Hungry artist" to visitors, before eating the banana, as, he insisted, a gesture of respect, rather than one of Dada-esque vandalism. Although not arrested, Datuna was asked to leave. Cattelan has been invited to tape a replacement banana to the gallery wall. *D.Telegraph*, 7+9 *Dec* 2019.

EDUARDO MUNOZ ALVAREZ / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

## UNEXPECTED FINDS | Coventry magnet-fisher catches mysterious cubes, while bored Plymouth resident discovers secret tunnel





ABOVE: The mysterious cubes found by Will Read when 'fishing' with a magnet in a Coventry river. The cubes each bear neat grids containing what appear to be Sanskrit letters, and may be linked to a Hindu prayer ritual. BELOW: Jake Brown discovered a 120-year-old tunnel beneath his Plymouth home after becoming bored during the current lockdown.

#### **MYSTERY CUBES**

MILL READ / FACEBOOK

A man and his two young sons were using a magnet to 'fish' for metal objects in a Coventry river when they reeled in almost 60 cubes inscribed with a mysterious script. The engraved lead squares were found in the river Sowe by Will Read, 38. The face of each cube bears a neat grid with what appear to be Sanskrit letters. All the cubes are identical except for a different face on one side.

After cleaning them up, he posted images of the cubes on Facebook and Reddit appealing for information about his unusual catch. Responses suggest the objects are linked to a Hindu prayer ritual which takes effect when they are thrown in running water. The 'magic squares' are said to be a form of yantra, containing a numerical formula to invoke the protection of Rahu, one of nine major astronomical bodies in Indian astrology. Rahu, generally



considered a malefic planet, is associated with materialism, mischief, fear and obsession, and presides over thieves, magicians, snakes, poison and politicians. One suggestion is that whoever placed the cubes in the river was seeking protection from "hidden enemies, wrong diagnosis of illness and deceit". coventrytelegraph.net, 12 May *2020.* 

#### **TIME TUNNEL**

A Plymouth man has discovered a secret 120-year-old tunnel beneath his house during the coronavirus lockdown. Jake Brown, who recently purchased the Georgian property, said "curiosity and a little boredom" caused him to start excavating his basement after noticing a patch on the exterior wall of a different texture to the rest.

He found a tunnel leading to a cavernous space 5m (16ft) deep, 3m (10ft) high, and 3m (10ft) wide. The cellar contained old builders' waste, including bottles etched with detailing indicative of the early 1900s, tins of paint with 1950s/1960s-style labels, and an old newspaper, which was extremely fragile and "almost disintegrated upon human touch". Jake managed to salvage some fragments of the "congealed brown mess" by soaking it in a warm bath and then using tweezers to separate it. A barely-legible date of 1964 established that the space had been blocked up for over 50 years. An historian friend said the house's location had once been a large hill that was "quarried away to almost high-tide level," adding that he had seen similar spaces "turned into wine cellars, a place to grow mushrooms, and... a 'grotto' type bathing area." plymouthherald.co.uk; Metro; D.Mirror, 4 May 2020.



## FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS | Plague doctor sightings spread to London, plus the man behind the 5G conspiracy tape revealed

#### **NORFOLK PLAGUE DOCTOR** [FT393:4]



Police have identified the person seen walking around a Norfolk village dressed as a 17th

century plague doctor as a boy in his late teens. He had been taking his daily exercise in various parts of Hellesdon, near Norwich, wearing a black cloak, hat and pointed beaklike mask. "The individual has been spoken to about the consequences of his actions and the effects they may have on some people in the local community," said a Norfolk police spokeswoman. "He was given words of advice as a result."

Another 'plague doctor' has been spotted in north London's Crouch End. One resident said he was casually "walking along, tipping his hat to people." He has been sighted in various Crouch End streets and shops, including the Coop supermarket and a local newsagent. BBC News, 4 May; hamhigh.co.uk, 7+8 May 2020.

#### **SCROLL DECEPTION** [FT393:12]



Washington DC's Museum of the Bible, found to have unwittingly purchased 16 fake fragments of the

Dead Sea Scrolls, is again in the spotlight following the arrest of an Oxford University associate professor of papyrology and Greek literature. Dr Dirk Obbink is suspected of involvement in the theft of ancient papyri bearing fragments of biblical scripture. The papyri are part of the Oxyrhynchus Collection housed at Oxford's Sackler Gallery and owned by the Egypt Exploration Society (EES). But 16 pieces had somehow ended up in



ABOVE: Another plague doctor has been spotted, this time in north London.

a collection belonging to the Museum of the Bible, founded in 2017 by a family of billionaire American evangelical Christians who own a chain of crafting stores.

Dr Obbink, who denies any wrongdoing, was suspended from duties at Oxford in October 2019 following an investigation into the disappearance of materials from the Oxyrhynchus collection. Thames Valley police were notified of the alleged theft on 12 November and arrested Dr Obbink in March 2020. He has been released pending further enquiries.

The EES alleges the materials were removed from Oxford University premises and sold to the Museum of the Bible, but EES director Dr Carl Graves confirmed that the Museum of the Bible have been cooperative, returning the missing fragments. "These are early fragments of the Gospels or biblical fragments," he said. "They are testament to Egypt's early Christian heritage and are early evidence of biblical

scripture. We don't value them monetarily but they are priceless and irreplaceable." Some of the fragments contain only one or two words, and Graves said it had taken decades of work to piece them together. They contain extracts from Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy, among others.

In a statement, Dr Obbink described as "entirely false" any allegations that he had stolen or sold the papyri fragments, claiming "there are documents being used against me which I believe have been fabricated in a malicious attempt to harm my reputation and career". theguardian.com, 16 Apr 2020.

#### **DIVINE PROTECTION?** [FT393:6]



The London church under investigation by the Charity Commission for selling

'coronavirus protection kits' (a bottle of oil and some red yarn) at £91 each, is still marketing the product

under another name: "divine cleansing oil". Inhaled via a towel and hot water in a bowl three times a day, a Kingdom Church spokesperson claimed it would prevent and cure coronavirus. "We are helping the nation," the man said. "We are convinced this cures coronavirus. We have sold nearly 2,000 of these." The Charity Commission said it has been liaising with Southwark Council's Trading Standards department, who are also investigating the issue. Southwark Council warned there were "many scams relating to Covid-19" and said consumers should "be on guard for bogus test kits, cures and treatments and other financial scams." BBC News, 30 Apr 2020.

#### **COVID-19 CONSPIRACY THEORIES [FT393:4, 16]**



A 38-minute recording of a man claiming to be a former Vodafone executive that 🎚 went viral around

the end of March is believed to have helped incite the torching of mobile phone masts and harassment of telecoms engineers. The speaker has been identified as Jonathon James, an evangelical pastor who preaches regularly at the **Light City Christian Ministries** in Luton. In the recording, he warns the public that the coronavirus pandemic is a plot "to try to hide the fact that people are dying from the 5G frequency", also suggesting that Bill Gates is involved in developing a coronavirus vaccine that will contain computer chips enabling authorities to track individuals.

"The coronavirus is not what's killing people, it is clearly, categorically, unequivocally proven that the radio frequencies we are being exposed to are killing the people," James states in the

## STRANGE DAYS

recording. "God has blessed me with the ability to bring disparate pieces of information together that puts the puzzle together and makes sense of it."

Vodafone stated that he had worked for them in a sales capacity in 2014, but had no involvement in 5G technology and had left the company within a year.

Although not the first to link the pandemic with the 5G network, James's recording has been shared widely around the world, with millions of views, despite YouTube removing numerous versions. It has also been circulated on WhatsApp and has been particularly popular in the US and Nigeria. James and others have asserted, without proof, that 5G radiofrequencies lead to cell poisoning.

When contacted by a journalist, James said he "was absolutely shocked that [a] somewhat 'private message' to a dedicated small community went viral and [was] ubiquitously covered [on] various social media platforms," and also stated: "For the record, I certainly wasn't trying to vilify, incriminate or implicate any mobile network operator for their commercial endeavours to roll out their unified telecoms and next generation of mobile topologies in this regard."

Since leaving Vodaphone, he claims to have advised central bankers in "the Congo" and Bangladesh on cryptocurrencies, and says that in 2018 he urged Zimbabwean politicians to adopt Bitcointype products pegged to diamond deposits through blockchain technology in order to save the country's economy. Asked for a final comment, James said he was unable to reply as he'd "had some rather pressing head of state engagement necessitating my full attention and time [for the] last 48 hours." cdc.gov/ nceh/radiation; apnews,com, 21 Apr; theguardian.com, 24 Apr 2020.



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

DISNEY WAS

A PIONEER

IN GIVING

US NATURAL

GUARDIAN

#### DISNEY'S FAIRY FAITH

Every researcher has a file of mysteries – questions that, despite years of work, they simply cannot answer. In a decade of studying fairylore I've amassed quite a few. When did Europeans start painting fairies with wings? What was Yeats's fairy secret? Why do English fairies like oaks above all other trees?

In this list of fairy problems, the 'did-Walt-Disney-believe-in-fairies?' mystery is a nut I've spent a long time trying to crack. Looked at one way, the evidence suggests that Disney had a secret life in which he communed with fairies; looked at another way, we have some kind of misunderstanding. First, a little background, though.

Disney put fairies in his animations from 1922. They were frequent guests in his *Silly* 

Symphonies in the late 1920s and the 1930s (about 10 per cent have fairies). Then we have the first 20 years of feature-length films: Snow White, Fantasia, Pinocchio, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Darby O' Gill and the Little People (and the Gremlin film he considered making with Roald Dahl). Of course, you can write fairy books, compose fairy symphonies and draw fairy cartoons without believing. But in the mid late 1950s Walt Disney of 'USA' appeared in the membership list of the Fairy Investigation Society (FIS), a British society dedicated to, well, fairies (see **FT321:30-37, 38-45**). There were about 100 members, including several famous individuals, and the organisation was

Theosophical in outlook. Members believed, in other words, that fairies were 'elementals', cogs within the natural world, and that different natural objects (trees, rose bushes, lakes) each had their own fairy. I used to think that Disney accidentally got his name put down: perhaps reaching out to the organisation in 1955 when there was a lot of FIS publicity in newspapers and while he was

revving up to produce *Darby O'Gill*.

But having spent much of the lockdown re-watching old Disney movies – there is a book coming out on fairy films and I'm excited to be a contributor – I am starting to change my mind. Particularly in the Silly Symphonies and Fantasia there are Theosophical-style fairies: the kind of fairy you would expect from an

FIS sympathiser. Early Disney fairies are frequently, in fact, shown to be natural forces, moving and sometimes dancing in harmony with the seasons. Today, the Theosophical fairy is standard cinematic fare – Fern Gully, Epic, Tinkerbell and so on. But Disney was a pioneer in giving us natural guardian fairies in the pre-war period. A strong sense of natural process permeates several later Disney films, too, even those without fairies: think of Bambi.

So did Disney believe in fairies? Before I would have answered 'probably not'. Now I'm a definite 'maybe'.

Simon Young's new book *Magical Folk: British* and *Irish Fairies* is out now from Gibson Square.



#### UFO FILES / FLYING SORCERY UFOLOGICAL NEWS AND VIEWS

## Seeing and believing

COMMUNION

#### **PETER BROOKESMITH** surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

#### **NOTHING TO SEE HERE, FOLKS**

It is a curious fact that no sooner have I sent off the copy for this column (as tight to

press day as I dare) than something new inevitably pops up on the intertubes that would have been worth mentioning. One such, last month, was the US Navy's release of three videos of 'unidentified flying objects'. It's possible, I suppose, that you've been hiding out from the WuFlu under a rock with your herd of pet toads and reading nothing but the sports pages of USA Today and of course, this illustrious journal – and so have not heard this bit of news just yet. But now you have. The so-called 'mainstream media' reported the release as some kind of

fresh revelation, but the three videos are precisely the same as those touted about since late last year by Tom DeLonge & Co, a.k.a. TTSAAS. The Dept of Defense said: "After a thorough review, the department has determined that the authorized release of these unclassified videos does not reveal any sensitive capabilities or systems, and does not impinge on any subsequent investigations of military air space incursions by unidentified aerial phenomena. DOD is releasing the videos in order to clear up any misconceptions by the public on whether or not the footage that has been circulating was real, or whether or not there is more to the videos. The aerial phenomena observed in the videos remain characterized as 'unidentified'." Which could mean a lot of things – see the comments on the release at www.metabunk.org/threads/explained-newnavy-ufo-videos.11234 – although it hardly invalidates the pretty thorough analyses by the metabunk gang. There's a full list of those at the above address. Don't read them all at once, unless you really want to go cross-eyed.

#### **ANOTHER WHIMSY FROM WHITLEY**

Here's another one that cropped up after my deadline. Whitley Strieber has always been coy about the origin and nature of what he calls his "visitors", and doesn't like to call them 'aliens'. Which is ironic, given the part the cover illustration for Communion played in cementing a certain image of the Greys that everyone else called aliens. But such is life. Now, in an excerpt from a new book, A

New World, published on ancient astronautist Graham Hancock's website (https:// grahamhancock.com/strieberw1/), Strieber

> offers a suggestion that he's found out. Or at least he has an hypothesis of sorts.

> In the summer of 2019 Strieber was being driven through the Lakota Sioux Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, where he was attending a small conference. He closed his eyes, and: "I saw movement behind my closed lids what looked like shadowy trees and rolling hills, but not the ones we were passing. Surprised, I opened them immediately. I couldn't understand why I'd been seeing anything at all. When I closed them again, what I saw simply took my

breath away. I sat there watching an entire second landscape flow past the car. Although it seemed to be twilit rather than sunny, the effect was so vivid it was like wearing a virtual reality headset... It wasn't as if I was in two places at once, but rather looking out the windows of my heart into two worlds that have been locked forever in a secret embrace and seeing that wonderful, sweet thing for the first time."

There is more – loads more – detail, of course, and a long discussion of the difference between parallel and mirror universes. Strieber favours the idea that he was somehow granted visionary access to a mirror universe and (with a diversion or two into Homer's accounts of the asphodel fields wherein dwell the Ancient Greek dead) speculates that this is where his visitors originate. Well, it's a point of view. The possibility that all this occurs within his own brain never seems to occur to him, despite

many persons having pointed out the number of fabulations in his oeuvre. Still, it's a good eye-popping read. Make of it what you will.

#### **RHINO ON ROAD**

The excellent Jack Brewer (of The UFO Trail blog) has come up with another fine commentary, this one on the perennial presence of misperceptions in UFO sightings. But the gem in this post comes from Eric Wojciechowski, whom Brewer introduces as a speaker on UFO topics, an author, and contributor of articles to several publications. It has nothing to do with UFOs, but everything to do with seeing things that are most definitely not what they first seem. Here is Mr Wojciechowski:

"In the summer of 2011, I took my family to Atlanta, Michigan... My brother and his family joined us as well.

"One of the days, we took a trip to Mackinaw and on the way back, I was driving and my brother was in the passenger seat. It was probably around 7pm. As I'm driving, I notice in the intersection up ahead, a rhinoceros was in the intersection, making a left-hand turn. As I was about to draw attention to it, the illusion broke and it wasn't a rhino but a car, making a left-hand turn. It was a trick of sunlight and shadow.

"However, just as my mind registered the error and I saved myself from saying anything embarrassing, my brother took off his sunglasses and said, 'What the hell?'

"I said, 'Did you see the rhinoceros too?' "And as I said it, he also registered it was just a car and we both had a laugh about it.

"Somehow, the sun and shadow at that very moment made the car ahead look like a rhinoceros. I have no idea how that happened but we still laugh about it today."

So, the next time you see a troop of UFOs cruising through the day or night sky, consider that they may be a flight of satellites... or a few cars... or just a stream of mischievous baby rhinos. Hey, why not?



MARTIN BERNETTI / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



## UFO FILES / UFO CASEBOOK THE REAL-LIFE X-FILES

## Close encounters of the blurred kind

JENNY RANDLES says a new theory about Rendlesham might throw new light on nagging questions

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Beings that mess with human minds have been part of folklore for centuries, but ufology has paid them less attention than they deserved, given that researchers like Jacques Vallee and John Keel saw this link early on. These tricksters, though, were not usually of the human variety.

Nick Redfern has published a book about Britain's best-known case in the year of its 40th anniversary, and in *The Rendlesham* Forest UFO Conspiracy he finds dark themes underscoring that event and documents sinister forces causing civilians and USAF witnesses to claim weird time loss and physiological experiences during that Christmas weekend.

I got involved in the affair just days after it occurred. I've long wondered whether its 'alien' nature was created to obscure something else. Just weeks after the event. I noted how it seemed to have been spoonfed to the UFO community, as if we were pawns deployed to spread disinformation. I considered all sorts of reasons why intelligence forces might use ufology to suggest aliens had landed - one being a cover up of an accident involving a nuclear weapon then secreted on the US Bentwaters airbase. Or perhaps it was side effects from over-the-horizon radar research that had been carried out around Rendlesham. Could this have had physiological and psychological impacts on witnesses?

I mused about this to the science journal OMNI in 1982, before Rendlesham was popularised as an alien contact case by the world's media. Nobody took my idea seriously. But years later, via the Freedom of Information Act, I saw how the British Liaison officer had reported this interview to the MoD. He felt it fortunate that UFO enthusiasts would not accept my theory, implying the idea of an alien contact was too big a lure for them. He was right – but why was the MoD relieved? Did they know what really caused the experience of those USAF airmen in the forest? If so, my 'wrong' suggestion would not unravel the cover-up or cause credible media to start digging.

I never went so far as to suspect an experiment in which SAS operatives went rogue, using drugs, lasers, holograms to disorient troops new to the country. Redfern's evidence suggests this was a revenge mission for alleged rough treatment by US forces. But if it was such an unofficial 'experiment' it makes me ponder things that happened during the case. I'm sure that something strange happened in Suffolk;

perhaps it was neither just a misperceived lighthouse nor an alien contact, though both factored into the psychological equation of deception for sure. The Orford Ness lighthouse, long blamed by some researchers, does look odd from within the forest – especially so to young airmen unfamiliar with local geography. Moreover, the very same lighthouse was put forward as a cause for UFO sightings by RAF and USAF staff around East Anglian bases, including Bentwaters, in a famous case from 1956. Perhaps it was another useful patsy to help 'manufacture' an alien invasion.

However, there are other reasons why I'm not dismissing Redfern's theory of an 'experiment' that got out of hand – not least the baffling behaviour of the MoD. It seems impossible to believe that the first they knew of the Rendlesham events was when briefed three weeks afterwards. The entire base was agog within hours; local civilians reported things, too, and Suffolk police were called to the site by base officers on the night and logged this. The MoD could not have been in the dark for a month.

Local UFO researcher Brenda Butler was told of the case within hours, and I learned of it via a radar operator at an RAF base called up by Bentwaters. This was all before the MoD got started; which, given what was being alleged and the evidence (ground traces, radiation readings, photographs and radar data), beggars belief. Either our Cold War defence readiness was disgraceful or the MoD suspected the truth and merely went through the motions of an investigation. It also makes more sense that the rapid leaking of this case to Brenda and me was part of a plan to involve the UFO community; after all, ufologists are pretty good at chasing phantoms and talking about it a lot. If something that could embarrass the MoD had taken place, then seeding UFO researchers into the mix may have been part of a strategy of plausible deniability. Distract attention. Make a pretense of interest.

That the MoD were aware early on that things were not what they seemed is also suggested by events that seemed odd at the time but might now make sense. Why, given radiation levels detected in a forest by USAF airmen, was no attempt made to investigate or close off a picnic area frequented by locals? I hope the MoD chose not to do so as they knew it was unnecessary. They were informed early on that photographs of the 'UFO'

had been taken by airmen and a live tape recording made by senior officers almost unprecedented evidence that UFO enthusiasts had spent years pursuing. So why did the MoD make no effort to secure this data, even though it stayed on base for years? Knowing the true cause and its embarrassing repercussions might make sense of this obfuscation. It also puts in a new light reports from a Navy man soon after the case that British crew off the coast that night were ordered below decks when the incident occurred. Did someone in authority know that these sailors should be kept apart from what was going on?

Awareness of UK complicity would also explain why I had interactions with 'security' in unprecedented ways. When Brenda, her colleague Dot Street and I joined forces to investigate the case, we became subject to regular phone intercepts and odd vans parked outside. It might also explain why I had mail intercepted by what I was told was 'Special Branch' and why a mysterious prankster was sending out letters and tapes, trying to get researchers into trouble by pretending to be them. Special Branch ended up 'investigating' these people too. We were even later told that Brenda, Dot and I were suspected of being part of the Women's Peace Campaign protesting nuclear weapons on airbases. Was it an excuse to keep us under investigation in case we got close to the truth?

Much that was baffling about this affair would make sense in the context of what Redfern argues; even that what witnesses experienced on the night was oddly personalised, as might be expected if it were caused by a 'drug attack'. Was it a 'coincidence' that the events occurred on a holiday when a Soviet rocket was predicted to cross the skies, adding a readymade back-up explanation to steer media away? A local farmer at the time of the events reported that his cows ran in front of a passing car and were injured. But he then disappeared. We traced him, after much effort; he had moved far away after receipt of compensation for the 'incident'. I got the impression that he was under a nondisclosure agreement. But why would he be, if this was just a UFO case? None of these things proves Nick Redfern's new argument about a rogue experiment, but they pose interesting questions now worth asking.

For Jenny's account of the Rendlesham affair, see FT336:24-25, 337:28-29, 338:26-27, 339:26-27, 340:28-29.

# MIND WARPI

## CERN, THE MANDELA EFFECT, AND THE MULTIVERSE

Reality appears to be changing around us, and not for the better, from minor facets of pop culture to major historical events. **BRIAN J ROBB** investigates the spread of the Mandela Effect and explores some suggested causes, from time travellers to alternate universes

he world can be a strange place, but it seems to have become even stranger in recent years. Many people - some conspiracy theorists, some reputable scientists - have begun to question the very nature of our consensus reality. There is increasing evidence of 'glitches in the Matrix', where things appear to have changed according to many people's independent recollections. This was branded the Mandela Effect, an apparent misremembering of recent history or facets of shared pop culture (see FT362:68, 368:53).

These seeming alterations to our reality have resulted in a search for possible causes, from interfering time travellers, slippage from alternate universes and the multiverse, or the recent operations of the Large Hadron Collider at CERN altering reality around us. More mundanely, perhaps we still don't fully understand the mysteries of memories, how they are formed and recalled, and the seemingly shifting nature of our reality is simply the result of confabulation.

What is the Mandela effect exactly? The term has become attached to notions of false memory, or the inaccurate recall of details of past events, and was coined in 2010 by 'paranormal consultant' Fiona Broome in relation to widespread false memory reports concerning the death in prison of South African anti-apartheid campaigner Nelson Mandela. According to Broome, thousands of people reported 'remembering' that Mandela had died in prison, when in fact he was released in 1990, went on to become South Africa's President between 1994 and 1999, and died in 2013, aged 95. Broome counted herself among their number: "See, I thought Nelson Mandela died in prison," she recalled. "I thought I remembered it clearly, complete with news clips of his funeral, the mourning in South Africa, some rioting in cities, and the heartfelt speech by his widow..." Despite these major news



People have a tendency to fall in line with the beliefs of others

events – Mandela's release and his becoming South Africa's first President – it appeared a significant number of other people clearly recalled reporting of Mandela's death in prison during the 1980s, going so far as to remember watching his funeral live on television.

This presents such a major disconnect between reality and perception that it opens up all sorts of questions. Those who remember the 'correct' history – Mandela's true path through life – find it hard to understand how others can be so wedded LEFT: South African President Nelson Mandela died in 2013 at the age of 95. So why do many people share a false memory of his demise in prison in the 1980s, and even of watching his funeral on television at the time?

to another story, while those whose perceptions differ from the majority greet the news that their 'memory' is wrong with a degree of incredulity, so clear is the perception of their 'version' of events. This mismatch creates a disconnect between people and their versions of the world we live in, giving rise to a kind of false consciousness among a significant number of the population. Can we rely on our collective memory, or could both versions of Mandela's life story, despite people recalling it divergently, actually be true? If so, what might the explanation for that be?

For psychologists, this disconnect between memories and reality

is known as confabulation. This suggests a disturbance of memory or a person's recollections where memories are misinterpreted or misremembered, despite solid evidence to the contrary. It is not an intentional process and is thought to relate to minor brain damage. Some neuroscientists suggest the Mandela Effect is simply an example of the suggestibility of humans. People have a tendency to fall in line with the beliefs of others, to be part of the crowd, to have their thoughts and feelings confirmed through strength of numbers. If one or more people in a social group express a strong belief in an 'alternative fact', then it is likely that a good proportion of those close to them or within their social circle will also subscribe to the same belief, often without even thinking about it. This is all the more likely when the belief concerns something trivial, like an aspect of pop culture, although it can be extended into more meaningful matters like political viewpoints.

After all, birds of a feather tend to flock together...





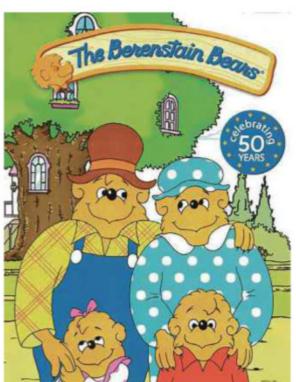
**BEARS, TOONS & THE WICKED WITCH** 

BETTMANN VIA GETTY IMAGES

There are other examples of these differing recollections, many pertaining to various aspects of pop culture. For example, do you remember the Berenstain Bears? This American children's book series has been running since it was created by authors Stan and Jan Berenstain in 1962, and is now carried on by their son, Mike. Now, you have to assume the Berenstain's would know how to spell their own surname. However, there are many people who insist they always knew the series as the 'Berenstein Bears', as in Frankenstein or Einstein (more common spellings), not -stain. The misunderstanding is so prevalent that if you type "Berenstain Bears" into Google, the top question you are offered is: "Why did Berenstein Bears change to Berenstain?" There's no question of whether or not it actually changed implied in that phrasing, just the question of why. All those who recall Berenstein can't be wrong, so the name must've been changed at some point. They've been dubbed 'Schrodinger's Bears' - simultaneously 'Berenstain' and 'Berenstein'. However, the authors have always been the Berenstains.

How about Warner Bros. cartoons, featuring Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and Elmer Fudd? Generations have grown up watching these Looney Toons on television or DVD. Except, they're not and never have been 'Looney Toons' but Looney Tunes. Not only have viewers claimed to clearly remember watching Looney Toons all these years, but they also claim to have seen the phrase used online and in television listings guides. Matters are confused further by the existence of 'Tiny Toon Adventures', a kind of junior version of Looney Tunes that ran from 1990 to 1992 (and in endless repeats on the Cartoon Network). Millennials especially probably grew up watching more Tiny Toons than original 1940s Looney Tunes, and that might explain some of the confusion.

There are many more trivial examples of our collective failure of memory, such as the fact that the Ford motor car company logo now features a little twirl on the bar



## Something has been responsible for changing reality around us

that crosses the 'F' that many swear wasn't there before. Take a look: it's been that way since 1912, but it somehow looks odd, as if it is a new innovation. Then there's the heroic Tiananmen Square protestor who was run down by tanks in 1989 (except he wasn't), or how the Wicked Queen in Disney's 1937 Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs says "Mirror, mirror on the wall" when the actual phrase used is "Magic mirror on the wall" (that's in the film; it is actually "Mirror, mirror" in the Brothers Grimm fairy tale). In the game of Monopoly, Uncle Pennybags (the Monopoly man character) has a monocle, right, as well as a top hat? Nope, he doesn't,

**LEFT:** The iconic Tiananmen Square 'tank man' was not, in fact, run over by a tank. **BELOW LEFT:** The Berenstain Bears have *never* been the 'Berenstein Bears'. **BELOW:** Uncle Pennybags of Monopoly fame has only ever worn a monocle in the alternative universe of the Mandela Effect.



and never has since the launch of the game in America in 1936. Peckish? Fancy a break with a Kit-Kat? Well, you're out of luck as it is actually spelled KitKat, with no hyphen. This mix of false recollections of trivial facts, pop culture, and major historical events suggests something big must be happening to our brains.

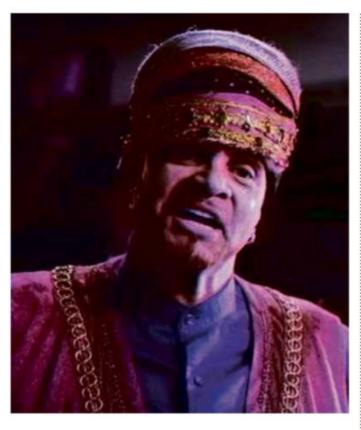
#### **FALSE MEMORY CONTAGION**

What possible explanations are there for this widespread disconnect between people's honestly held memories and apparent reality? The process of forming, retaining, and recalling memories is not yet fully understood. It has been shown that over time memories can be distorted, that the act of conscious recollection can also change memories, and that it is possible to implant completely false memories into susceptible people. There's also the idea of 'social contagion' of memories, how 'memory conformity' can alter people's recollections so that they fall in line with the majority recall of those people with whom they share social (or online) space. "One person's memory infects another," claimed Dr Henry Roediger, a professor at Washington University's Memory Lab. This contagion can be exacerbated, spread, and reinforced online, resulting in vast swathes of the population of the Internet recalling a non-existent movie like Shazaam (see panel opposite) and reinforcing each other's memories of it. Confabulation, suggestibility, cognitive dissonance and confirmation bias are all offered up by science as explanations for the Mandela Effect on memory.

What if the truth were something more outlandish, however? There's no end of explanations and theories that go beyond our poor understanding of the ways in which memories are created and how recollection functions. Some of them get quite wacky, but lots have a ring of plausibility about them, especially to those who have direct unsettling experience of finding their memories don't match with so-called 'objective' reality. Prime among the explanations offered is that all these memories are real - or at least they were real once. Something or someone has been responsible for changing reality around us, resulting in a mismatch between what is

## SHAZAAM: A MULTIVERSE MOVIE MYSTERY

An example of the Mandela Effect from the world of movies is the non-existent Shazaam film that many people swear blind they've seen (this was before 2019's Shazam superhero movie). Over many years, online posters have shared their memories of a 1990s movie that starred American comedian Sinbad as an incompetent genie who grants wishes to a pair of children. Among those recalling this film was a man who worked in a video store in the 1990s who ordered the tapes then watched them several times to check for tape damage; according to him, he'd seen the non-existent Shazaam multiple times. Talking to the New Statesman (not exactly a fortean publication), one viewer who fondly recalled Shazaam exclaimed: "It feels like part of my childhood has now been stolen from me. How does a movie simply vanish from our history?"







**LEFT:** The College Humor website further muddied the Mandela Effect waters in which the non-existant *Shazaam* swims by releasing 'lost footage' from the film on 1 April 2017. **BELOW LEFT:** A poster for the 1996 film *Kazaam*, starring Shaquille O'Neal. **BELOW RIGHT:** A fake VHS copy of *Shazaam*, with Sinbad's head on a wrestler's body.

Of course, that movie never existed in the first place. One distraught viewer who simply couldn't believe the film didn't exist posted a \$1,000 bounty online for anyone who could find it. Others offered detailed sceneby-scene recollections of the movie, down to the climax taking place at a pool party. From about 2009, hundreds of posters to a Reddit thread shared their memories of Shazaam – were they all deluded? Sinbad – comedian David Adkins - even had to deny appearing in such a movie, only adding to some people's idea that there are greater, darker forces at work. "It's a conspiracy," declared one Reddit user. "I swear this movie exists." In 2015, the Berenstain/Berenstein

Bears story broke, provoking a rush of Mandela Effect articles and a boom in Shazaam recollections. This helped turn up a 1996 movie called Kazaam (note the double 'a') that starred basketball player Shaquille O'Neal (billed as 'Shaq' on the video cover) as a genie. Mystery solved, right? Everyone had misremembered this movie, substituting Sinbad for Shaq. However, those who insist they remember Shazaam also recall Kazaam, with many even claiming they remembered it as being a rip-off of their mysteriously missing movie. One explanation here is that 'the Internet' is becoming a replacement for reality: if it can't be found online, it simply doesn't exist.

recalled and what actually is. Quite why such an entity should focus on trivial pop culture elements like the Berenstain Bears or *Star Wars* movies (see p36) isn't exactly clear.

Are such discrepancies evidence of alternate realities, or interference in our reality by those from elsewhere? Across the multiverse, often inconsequential details of reality could be slightly different (Berenstain/Berenstein) while even large events could have different outcomes (the fate of Nelson Mandela). This suggests some confluence between various realities, with people slipping back and forth (largely unknown to them) from one universe to another (like the TV show Sliders) and finding that their memories are occasionally 'out of sync' with one or other reality. The idea that multiple universes - a multiverse - could exist simultaneously can be traced back to the work of quantum physicist Hugh Everett III, who first proposed the parallel realities theory back in 1957. The false memories now catalogued under the Mandela Effect could, therefore, be



**ABOVE:** Philosopher Nick Bostrom has argued that we could be living in something like *The Matrix*.

memories of reality from different timelines that have merged with our current world. Perhaps these parallel universes are merging, yet our collective memories are not being upgraded, wiped, or rewritten.

Another explanation is that we are all living in a computer simulation (see FT353:14) and the changes that have taken place around us are simply updates in the 'code' for our reality; the problem is that we're left with residual memories of the way things used to be. All of reality, encompassing not only the Earth but the rest of the observable Universe, may be simulated through technology so far in advance of our own that it appears to be magic (as Arthur C Clarke once posited). The inhabitants of this simulation (that is, us) are convinced enough by it to believe it is simple 'base' reality - at least until something happens which leads a proportion of us to question something fundamental.

One of the most vocal recent proponents of this idea has been Swiss philosopher Nick Bostrom, who is based at the University





WIN MCNAMEE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Unlike users of Star Trek's holodeck, we don't even know we're in a simulation. ABOVE RIGHT: Although Elon Musk thinks we probably are...

of Oxford. Bostrom argues that later generations of humanity, armed with ever more powerful computing power (possibly quantum computing), would almost inevitably create and run detailed simulations of life in the past, in the same way that we currently create television documentaries about history, immersive dramas, or virtual reality-style 'experiences' in the form of theme park rides or homebased amusements. The chances are high, he argues, that we could be inhabiting just such

a simulation, as in the 1999 movie *The Matrix* (see FT173:30-32). Says Bostrom: "Suppose that these simulated people are conscious (as they would be if the simulations were sufficiently fine-grained and if a certain quite widely accepted position in the philosophy of mind is correct). Then it could be the case that the vast majority of minds like ours do not belong to the original race but rather to people simulated by the advanced descendants of an original race... we are likely among the simulated minds

rather than among the original biological ones." We're all Sims (as in the computer game) locked into some kind of Star Trek Holodeck, but we just don't know it. This could account for the ongoing changes to our shared history and culture. There's a glitch in the Matrix and it's messing with our minds!

Several eminent names subscribe to, or at least support, the simulated reality theory. Among them are Neil deGrasse Tyson and Elon Musk. At the 2016 Isaac Asimov Memorial Debate held at New York's Hayden

## FEELING THE FORCE: STAR WARS AND THE MANDELA EFFECT

There are at least two distinct Mandela Effects concerned with the pop culture behemoth that is the Star Wars franchise. There's a famous moment (everyone knows it) from The Empire Strikes Back where bad guy Darth Vader (voiced by James Earl Jones) reveals his relationship to the hero, Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill). It's a famous quote we all remember: "Luke, I am your father!" Except - as video evidence attests the actual line as delivered in the film is: "No, I am your father." The 'Luke' version of the quote actually turns up in 'Jazzman',

a 1995 episode of The Simpsons dealing with the death of Lisa's musical hero **Bleeding Gums** Murphy. This suggests that The Simpsons' writers remembered it wrongly, and that their version worked its way into everyone else's memories... However, even James Earl Jones has recalled the line incorrectly on television

This next one I experienced myself, thus confirming to my own satisfaction that the Mandela Effect is a real thing. For years people believed that Star Wars protocol droid ("I am fluent in over six million forms of communication") C-3PO was gold all-over (his nickname - given to him by Han Solo – was 'Goldenrod', after all). C-3PO's image did



not change during the original trilogy of movies (1977-1983), and the action figures available always depicted him as all gold. It came as a shock to many, then, when sometime in the early-2000s it became clear that C-3PO had a silver right leg - and, what's more, had always had one. For many years I edited Star Wars Insider, the official Lucasfilm magazine, and despite needing to know everything about Star Wars, inside and out, I'd never noticed. It only became clear to me when on the set of Episode II: Attack of the Clones in Australia where I was told it

had always been the case. A little research in the Lucasfilm photo archives soon proved it to be true: C-3PO always had a silver right leg, even in the earliest photos from the 1976 shoot in the Tunisian desert, and I'd never noticed. In 2015, The Force Awakens seemed to be trolling fans with the revelation that C-3PO now had a red arm, and the dialogue: "It is I, C-3PO! You probably don't recognise me because of the red arm." Just for the record, C-3PO did not have a red arm prior to The Force Awakens, and it was back to gold for the final scene.

CBS VIA GETTY IMAGES



LEFT: A general view of the CERN Computer/Data Centre. BELOW: Professor Peter Higgs, who theorised the existence of the 'God Particle'.

Planetarium, American astrophysicist deGrasse Tyson argued that in terms of probability (as outlined by Bostrom) it is "very likely" that we are indeed inhabitants of a fake reality. Entrepreneur and rocket builder Elon Musk backs both Bostrom and deGrasse Tyson. "If you assume any rate of improvement at all, then [computer] games will be indistinguishable from reality, or civilisation will end. One of those two things will occur," Musk said in 2018. "Therefore, we are most likely in a simulation, because we exist. I think it is most likely – this is just about probability - there are many, many simulations. You might as well call them reality, or you could call them the multiverse."

Almost even more outlandish than Bostrom's simulation theory is the thought that our reality is being reshaped by time travellers. The question that arises here is why are these time travellers messing about with seemingly inconsequential things? Why aren't they killing Hitler, or saving JFK, rather than changing the Ford logo or changing the spelling of Berenstain? It is possible that time travellers are changing things all the time, but we all simply adjust as reality is warped around us. The things that seem discontinuous, the odd recollections of something being different, are simply residual memories reasserting themselves in the newly changed timeline.

## **ALTERING REALITY, CERN-STYLE**

One all-encompassing explanation is available for not just the Mandela Effect but also for so much that people think may have gone wrong with the modern world over the past few years. The blame can be firmly laid at the door of CERN, the European Council for Nuclear Research, and specifically the operation of their Large Hadron Collider in Switzerland.



## The theory is that the world as we knew it actually ended in 2012

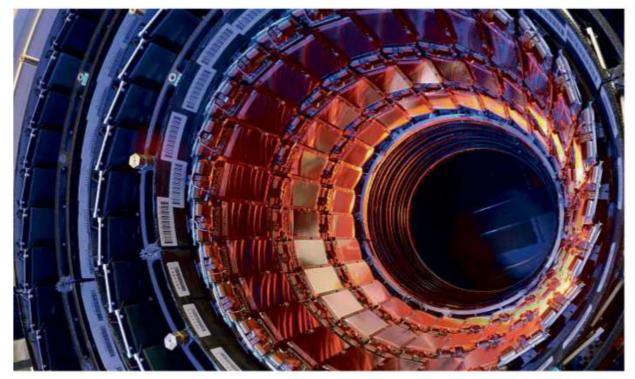
Established in 1954, CERN operates the largest particle physics laboratory in the world. Located 100m (330ft) underground, the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) studies particle collisions from a variety of scientific positions. Operations began towards the end of 2008, and the first recorded examples of the Mandela Effect occurred in 2009. Various attempts to collide beams of particles failed and the system was subject to periods of shutdown and repair, but the first successfully recorded particle collision took place in November 2009. Between 2010

and 2012, the energy level of the particle collisions was adjusted, leading to the discovery in June 2012 of the elusive Higgs Boson, a theorised sub-atomic particle that was necessary to explain why particles have mass. Having achieved that breakthrough, the LHC was deactivated in 2013 for a two-year period of maintenance, restarting for a prolonged second run in 2015. The LHC was again shut down in 2018 for another two-year maintenance period.

All this scientific activity has led to a great deal of less-than-scientific speculation about the effects that the operation of the LHC may have had on our reality, or our perception of it. The theory suggests that operations at CERN may have altered our world. According to CERN's own website, one "way of revealing extra dimensions would be through the production of 'microscopic black holes'... if micro black holes do appear in the collisions created by the LHC, they would disintegrate rapidly... creating events." The most extreme CERN theory is that the world as we knew it actually ended in 2012 when the Higgs Boson was uncovered by the LHC. Posted by Nick Hinton on a Twitter thread in the summer of 2019, the idea attracted considerable attention.

Who said no good could come of randomly smashing subatomic particles together just to see what happened in an attempt to recreate the conditions of the Big Bang? Well, the late Stephen Hawking, for one: "The God Particle found by CERN could destroy the Universe." The renowned physicist suggested in 2014 that the discovery of the Higgs Boson could spell the end of the world. The very high energy levels necessary to prove the existence of the Higgs Boson could also lead to a "catastrophic vacuum decay" which in turn would cause all of space and time to collapse, thereby







**ABOVE LEFT:** The Compact Muon Solenoid detector at the Large Hadron Collider was used in key experiments that led to the discovery of the Higgs Boson. **ABOVE RIGHT:** "Maybe CERN accidentally created a black hole that sucked us in without us even noticing, and we've just been living in it."".

destroying the Universe. What Hawking was referring to was not the Boson in particular but the 'Higgs potential', which suggests that high energies could disrupt the Universe; that this has not (apparently) happened, while past high energy events are recorded as having taken place, suggests that it is actually unlikely.

However, this was the basis for Nick Hinton's Twitter question: "What would happen if we destroyed the Universe? Would we know? Maybe CERN accidentally created a black hole that sucked us in without us even noticing, and we've just been living in it." In 2014, National Geographic published an article headlined "Are we Living in a Black Hole?" exploring 'unconventional' theories that our reality actually existed within one. One of the concerns about the activities at CERN was that the LHC could actually cause an unexpected space-time event, such as the creation of a black hole, that could destroy all of creation.

## THE WORLD'S GONE WRONG

Anecdotally, for many people, the world has simply 'not felt right' since somewhere around 2012. A lot has happened since then: Trump; Brexit; Coronavirus; even the death of pop icon David Bowie. For some of us, it's as if history has somehow gone wrong, or we've all stepped sideways into a mirror universe where the 'bad guys' are winning and things are generally terrible. The once bizarre idea that Donald Trump could be President of the US is now our reality. However, some of Trump's statements suggest that he doesn't even exist in the same world as the rest of us. After all, he has referenced a famous terrorist attack on Sweden, and claimed that Muslims were cheering in the streets of New York on 9/11. Many people believe statements like these are evidence of Trump's own mental instability (which alone is a terrifying idea, if true) rather than evidence that he once lived in another universe in which these things

actually did happen. Our collective reality and that of President Trump may not match up (but that might have nothing to do with CERN and the multiverse).

Do the dramatic events of recent years point to something unusual, or is that simply a misapprehension, and all we are witnessing is the usual, sometimes turbulent, ebb-and-flow of history? If things have changed, is that down to something more than the usual forces that act upon world events? Could unexpected consequences from mankind's meddling with the very fundamental forces of the Universe have caused the reality of our world to warp around us, taking on a new and more dangerous form?

The CERN experiments, the explorations of quantum computing, string theory, and ideas of quantum entanglement all point towards the concept of the multiverse. The idea of parallel universes is well established as a thought experiment, with nothing but theory to support it. The number of possible universes is deemed to be virtually unmeasurable, but one estimate uses the invogue string theory to suggest 'our' universe is just one of 10 to the power of 500 possible ones. Infinite realities, infinite universes, with all possible histories occurring simultaneously connected through vibrating cosmic strings forms the basics of string theory. If every outcome is possible and every action creates another splintered universe, does that not suggest there are universes where Donald Trump is *not* President of the United States and Brexit remains an unknown concept, where Bowie is alive and coronavirus never occurred? Those unhappy with the current reality might like to entertain the notion that thanks to the catastrophic actions of CERN, they have been catapulted into a different one, where things are not to their liking. Such a notion also explains all those little details that people appear to be mis-remembering that are now labelled as the Mandela Effect. In each 'new' universe, many small things may

be slightly 'off', just as the big things (like world politics) have gone through more dramatic changes.

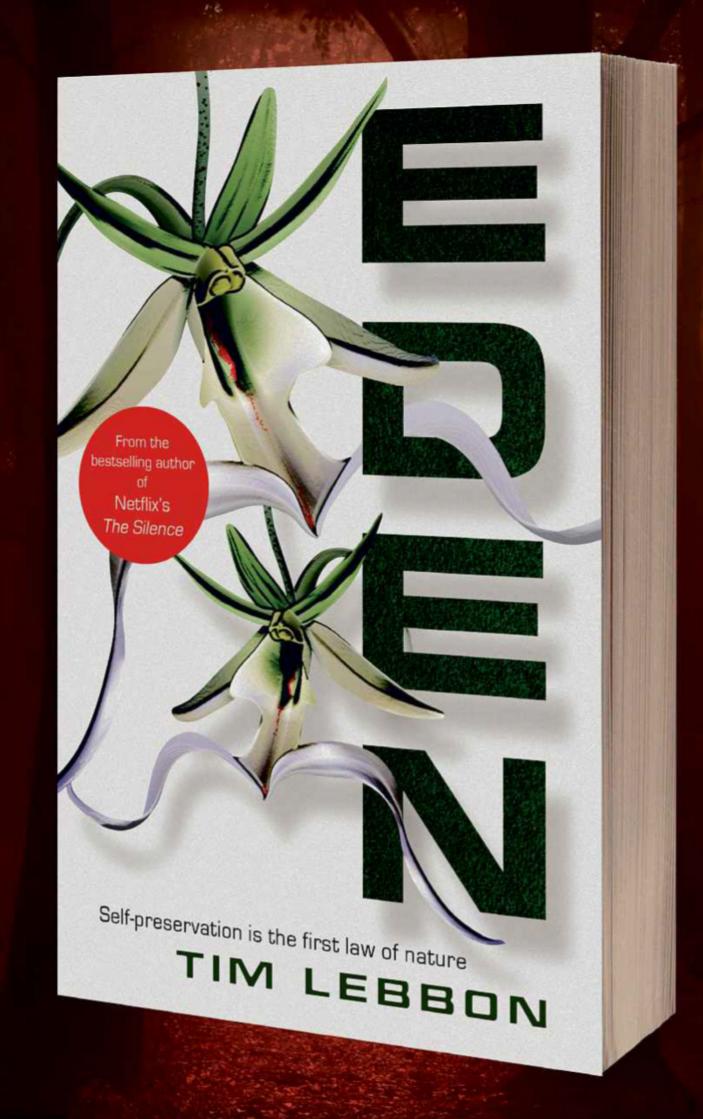
Alternatively (and, perhaps, even more depressingly) as a species have we actually reached the long-mooted 'end of history'? This was first proposed by historian Francis Fukuyama in a 1992 book in response to the collapse of the Berlin Wall and with it the East German regime. The term doesn't mean there will be no more 'history' to be experienced, but that the current political, cultural, economic, or social systems (or all simultaneously) have reached an end-point, a final form of the apotheosis of progress. This might suggest utopian thinking, but it can equally be seen as dystopian. What if the 'end of history' is simply the stagnation of human progress, the beginning of our going backwards – socially, culturally, politically, and economically - instead of onwards and upwards? Who, or what, could we blame then for the state of things, beyond ourselves?

Overall, there is a very simple answer to all of this. Everyone's perception of their universe is personal; no one else sees the world exactly as you do, as your experience is unique, made up of your own history and personality. The other thing to keep in mind is that our perception of the Universe is often weirder than any of us might think. Is the change that many people believe has occurred taken place in the external Universe or in our internal perception of it? Has our collective consciousness been altered, with the experience of the Mandela Effect being residual proof of that change? Maybe all this is simply the infinitely complex human mind playing tricks upon itself.

● BRIAN J ROBB is the author of books on silent cinema, superheroes, Philip K Dick, the Star Wars films and Walt Disney, as well as an award-winning guide to Tolkien's Middle-earth. He is a Founding Editor of the Sci-Fi Bulletin website and a regular contributor to FT. He lives in Edinburgh.

## "A TEXTURED, THOUGHT-PROVOKING THRILLER... YOU ARE IN THE HANDS OF A MASTER"

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## MEMORY HACKS, MURDER AND MK-ULTRA

We tend to believe that memory is mostly reliable, offering us an accurate and accessible "portrait of the past". But, as MARK GREENER reveals, our memories are often fragmented, disorted or false – and can be deliberately manipulated by those who wish to alter them...



ome people recall hearing that Nelson Mandela died in prison. Other recollect seeing sasquatch. Others that they've taken a trip with Nordic aliens in a UFO. Most are not lying or hoaxing. And no amount of scepticism or rationalisation can shake their vivid, detailed memories, even those at odds with accepted history (the Mandela - or, for X-philes, Mengele – effect; see pp.32-38). But some of these memories are false.

Indeed, most of us need false memories to get through the day. They help us cope with new experiences, keep us safe and bolster our self-image. Yet they have a dark side. False memories contribute the intense, intrusive, emotional recollections - sometimes with sounds, smells, tastes and sensations - characteristic of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). <sup>1</sup> Even flashbulb memories, such as 9-11, can include 'fabricated' details that people believe are true. <sup>2</sup> And we have no idea of how many people languish in jail after confessing to a crime they never committed because of a false memory. Worryingly, false recollections are remarkably easy to create, by our own minds or by memory hacks.

## To a certain extent, our self-identity is built on the lies we tell ourselves



**LEFT:** In the *X-Files* episode "The Lost Art of Forehead Sweat", the Mandela effect became the 'Mengele effect'. BELOW: Sir Frederic Bartlett giving a lecture to children on 'The Mind and Observation'.

### PORTRAITS OF OUR PAST

As you go about your daily life, you encounter information and have experiences that may be useful guides to future actions - so, they're worth keeping. I hope that the important points from this article will become stored – encoded – in your memory. Initially, this information is stored in your short-term memory, which lasts seconds to hours: it's easy to forget a new phone number. Some short-term memories become medium term, lasting hours to months. I can no longer recollect the molecular pathways I could regurgitate on demand for my finals, but when information or an experience is especially relevant, new data integrates with existing long-term memories. These 'consolidated' memories can persist for months, or for the rest of your life. The slow consolidation into long-term memory seems to allow the brain to alter the strength of the recollection depending on the event's importance.<sup>3</sup>

You might like to think that your memory captures an event with the accuracy of a high-end digital camera. And for decades, researchers believed that once consolidated. long-term memories were "indelible portraits of our past". 4 In reality, our memories are often fragmented, distorted and even false. (I'll leave memories recovered by hypnosis or other forms of regression, evoked by past-life therapies or involved in multiple personality disorders for another time.)

Memory remains 'fragile' for several hours after the event, which allows other elements to influence consolidation. And when a cue triggers recollection, memories become fragile once more. Doctors hope that this offers an opportunity to interrupt the cycle of involuntary recollection, re-experiencing and reconsolidation of traumatic memories that underlies PTSD and phobias. 5 But it

also means that when we remember we may re-write our memory and, sometimes, include false information. Indeed, memory, psychologist Nicholas Spanos noted, is "essentially reconstructive". <sup>6</sup>

For example, you don't usually accurately store an entire event. You inevitably forget or miss bits. But a fragmented memory isn't a good guide to avoiding dangerous, painful and frightening events. <sup>7</sup> So, you reconstruct a 'smooth', seemingly complete recollection from the fragments and sometimes include new information or consolidate similar events into one memory. 8 I regularly visited the Spanish City funfair in Whitley Bay when I was a kid. I can remember specific details when something unusual happened, but my memory probably blends several visits. In other words, I've constructed a narrative (a schema) for them. This creates a seamless memory that better guides your behaviour.

So, the reconstruction we call memory depends on what we have already stored, our needs, information obtained since the event, attitudes, concerns, beliefs, wishes and emotions. For instance, as memories aim to protect us, we tend to remember experiences that arouse emotion or cause stress. Negative recollections may also be more stable over time than positive memories. During the 1930s, psychologist Sir Frederic Bartlett proposed that memories often conform with our beliefs and expectations rather than being accurate representations. So, you tend to 'remember' details that were not present, but that can be inferred (such as that someone drove a car to work when no vehicle was mentioned) or come from general knowledge. One study asked people to look at a scene of a university office. People often recalled expected items that weren't there (such as books) and didn't recall unexpected items that were (for example, a picnic basket).9

Memory also lays the foundation of our self-image. Tragically, people who lose memory – such as Alzheimer's patients – can lose their identity. Conversely, false memories may help preserve our sense of identity. We may, for instance, generate false memories that align our past with our current beliefs and expectations – such as the expectation that we've held consistent values and opinions over time.

In one study, researchers asked people whether they'd want life-preserving treatments, such as feeding tubes, if they fell seriously ill. When researchers repeated the survey up to a year later, about a quarter had changed their mind. Up to three-quarters (69% and 75%) of these falsely believed that they gave the same answer each time. In addition, people tend to mistakenly feel that their situation, such as relationships, has improved over time. In other words, we tend to view the past through dark-tinted glasses and so have a falsely positive view of our current selves. It's a sobering thought that, to a certain extent, our self-identity is built on the lies we tell ourselves.



**ABOVE:** Research into people's memories of the 9-11 attack on the World Trade Center demonstrated that subjects' recall of events changed over time, with false memories emerging spontaneously.

## **MEMORIES OF 9-11**

These processes mean that many false memories arise spontaneously. For example, researchers interviewed 2,641 people exposed to the 9-11 attack and the destruction of the World Trade Center, and then again a year later. Almost half (45.7%) of those who said that they were not disturbed by a smell at Ground Zero at the first interview 'remembered' being disturbed by a smell a year later. Moreover, 20.9% and 15.8% recalled attending a funeral of someone killed in the attack or feeling that their life was in danger at the second interview, but not at the first. Perhaps more surprisingly, one in eight 'misremembered' knowing someone who was killed (12.9%) or seeing bodies, body parts or body bags (12.5%). 10

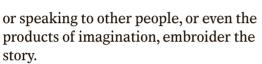
Another study asked 59 National Guard reservists about 19 traumatic events they might have experienced; firstly, one month after returning from the first Gulf War, and then two years later. Almost nine in 10 (89%) changed at least one response, while three in five (61%) changed at least two items. More than a third (35.6%) changed their response about feeling an extreme threat to their personal safety. A third

(33.9%) changed their response about seeing bizarre disfigurement of bodies and just over a quarter about seeing others killed or wounded (27.1%). About one in 10 changed their response about being in firefights or an ambush (both 10.2%) or seeing a close friend killed (8.5%). About one in 7 (13.6%) changed their response about seeing excessive violence or brutality, such as mistreatment of prisoners or mutilation of bodies. Almost one in 50 (1.7%) changed their mind about whether they'd participated in such events. <sup>11</sup>

Some, I suspect, might have realised in hindsight just how dangerous the deployment really was or questioned the morality of their actions; but most are probably false memories. In addition, we may subconsciously include false elements in our memories to cement relationships, which might include those affected by a 'shared' tragedy, such as 9-11 or a war; arguably, the same thing happens in alien abductee support groups.

These are important observations for fortean research. The core event – working at Ground Zero, fighting in the Gulf, alien 'abduction' – remains consistent. However, external elements gleaned from the media





That might be why false memories tend to become more and more inconsistent with the original event. Over time, false memories become increasingly detailed and can include thoughts and emotions supposedly experienced during the event. One study asked people about their memory of the OJ Simpson verdict – such as where they were when the jury returned – three days and then up to 32 months later. Almost three in 10 (29%) had a consistent memory. But inconsistencies tended to accumulate over time and by 32 months, two in five (40%) showed major distortions. <sup>12</sup>

Rapid investigation also helps identify potential hoaxes. Visualising an event makes it more likely that the person will come to believe it really happened – so-called imagination inflation. <sup>13</sup> In other words, lies sometimes develop into false memories, and the person can no longer distinguish reality from fiction.

So, if you're investigating, say, a UFO, a Loch Ness Monster sighting or a shooter on the Grassy Knoll, it's best to rely on the recollections recorded closest to the event. And if you ever experience a fortean event, write it down or record it as soon as you can.

That's one reason the Socorro, New Mexico, UFO encounter of 24 April 1964 remains so compelling and so difficult to explain away as an experimental craft, ball-lightning or a hoax.

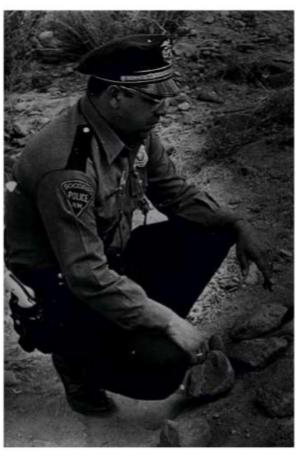
Deputy Marshal Lonnie Zamora reported parts of the encounter with a white, egg-shaped landed UFO and the "little people" who emerged from it in real time on his radio, calling for assistance from other officers who corroborated parts of his account. The Air Force sent an investigator to collect statements the same day. <sup>14</sup>

Quite what Zamora saw remains unclear.



## "There is no doubt that Zamora saw an object which left an impression on him"

Even the USAF's Project Blue Book failed to explain the close encounter. Hector Quintanilla, the project's last chief officer, commented in the CIA's journal *Studies in Intelligence* in 1966: "There is no doubt that Lonnie Zamora saw an object which left quite an impression on him. There is also no question about Zamora's reliability. He is a serious police officer, a pillar of his church, and a man well versed in recognising airborne vehicles in his area. He is puzzled



CLOYD TETER / THE DENVER POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Lonnie Zamora's account of his close encounter in Socorro, New Mexico, was given in real time over the police radio. LEFT: No video exists of the 1992 Amsterdam plane crash, yet many people remember watching the event on television at the time. FACING PAGE: The iconic stopped clock at Bologna's main railway station.

by what he saw, and frankly, so are we. This is the best-documented case on record, and still we have been unable, in spite of thorough investigation, to find the vehicle or other stimulus that scared Zamora to the point of panic." <sup>15</sup>

## STOP ALL THE CLOCKS

We're supposed to recall where we were and what we were doing when we heard about 9-11, Princess Diana's death or, if we're old enough, JFK's assassination. These 'flashbulb memories' are vivid recollections of a very traumatic or important event. You may not be able to fully assess a danger at the time: you're too busy surviving. A vivid memory allows you to review the event and helps avoid risky situations.

On 4 October 1992, a cargo plane crashed into an 11-storey block of flats in Amsterdam, killing four crew members and 39 people in the building, and causing a massive fire. No one recorded the crash, although some TV stations used animations to show the flightpath, but not the impact. Yet when researchers interviewed 193 people, 10 months after the tragedy, more than half (55%) said that they'd seen television film of the plane hitting the building. When researchers interviewed 93 law students, 66% said they'd seen the non-existent television film. <sup>16</sup>

False flashbulb memories can coalesce into collective representations. On 2 August 1980, at 10.25 in the morning, a terrorist bomb detonated at Bologna's main station, killing 85 people and wounding more than

## TOWARDS RETCON: THE MANIPULATION OF MEMORY

Inducing amnesia might seem like science fiction. Torchwood uses Retcon, the Men in Black a neuralyzer. But the CIA and US military intelligence have a longstanding interest in modifying behaviour generally and memory particularly. Finding a way to ensure that someone who knows too much forgets was, John Marks notes in his seminal book *The Search for the* Manchurian Candidate, "a prime objective of the ARTICHOKE and MKULTRA programs". 1

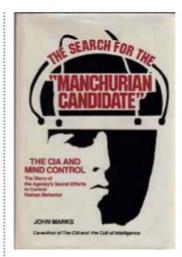
The CIA, worried about the USSR's supposed progress in unconventional warfare, argued that to defend against Russian mind control they needed to understand the offensive potential. But, Marks points out, "the line between offense and defence – if it ever existed – soon became so blurred as to be meaningless".

The mind control experiments began with Project CHATTER, which the US Navy started in 1947. CHATTER aimed to emulate, according to

declassified documents, the "'amazing results' achieved by the Soviets in using 'truth drugs'". In 1950, the CIA began Project BLUEBIRD, one aim of which was to develop ways to enhance memory. Think how useful it would be for a spy to accurately recall details during a secret mission.

In 1950, the CIA started working with external scientists to find a drug that destroyed memory. Inducing amnesia supported other aspects of the mind control programme. If you want to programme Manchurian Candidates, it's better that they don't recall they're programmed. And if a Russian agent being interrogated recalled an effective approach, it wouldn't remain secret for long.

The CIA's interest continued with MKULTRA. In April 1955, a CIA memo outlined the 17 aims of MKULTRA, which included "materials and physical methods which will produce amnesia for events preceding and during their use".<sup>2</sup>



For example, MKULTRA recognised that brain concussion "is always followed by amnesia for the actual moment of the accident". The memo suggested various ways to deliver an amnesiainducing blow including a "pancake type blackjack", "concealed or camouflaged springloaded impacting devices that trigger upon contact with the head" and an airgun that fired a "small shot-filled sack". The CIA even considered "an explosive pad detonated in contact with the head or body" and sound waves tuned to the resonance of the skull. MKULTRA also studied hypnosis, without much "operationally useful" success, as a means to

erase the recent past.

Pharmacology is subtler than a bang on the head. For instance, drugs that block a cell's ability to make protein do not alter an animal's ability to learn a new task, which depends on short-term memory. However, blocking protein production disrupts long-term memory. A single dose of anæsthetic propofol also seems to impair consolidation.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, glucocorticoids (a type of steroid), adrenaline, amphetamine and some drugs that act on the same biological pathways enhance consolidation. This makes sense biologically. You release adrenaline when you're stressed. Remembering a stressful event helps protect you when similar circumstances arise. But glucocorticoids impair recall of information already 'downloaded' to long-term memory.

For PTSD patients and many other people, the past is a foreign country that they have no wish to revisit. Even transitory recollections can be deeply distressing and disruptive. Numerous studies now suggest that certain drugs could finally help people let go of the past. But the memory loss probably won't be enough to reliably create the total amnesia needed by the spooks. As one outside consultant for ARTICHOKE remarked: "short of cutting a subject's throat, a true amnesia cannot be guaranteed".

### **NOTES**

- **1** J Marks, *The Search* for the 'Manchurian Candidate': The CIA and Mind Control, Allen Lane 1979.
- 2 United States Senate, Project MKULTRA, the CIA'S Program of Research in Behavioral Modification Joint Hearing Before the Select Committee on Intelligence and the Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research of the Committee on Human Resources: Ninety-Fifth Congress First Session; August 3, 1977. Available at https://www.intelligence. senate.gov/sites/default/ files/hearings/95mkultra. pdf.
- **3** A Galarza Vallejo et al, *Science Advances*, 2019;5:eaav3801.

200. The explosion damaged a large clock, which stuck at the time of the bombing. The clock was repaired and worked for 16 years. Then in 1996, the clock was set permanently at 10.25 as a memorial.

When researchers asked 173 people who knew the clock was stopped, 92% said that it had always been broken and 79% said the time had remained at 10.25 ever since the bombing – including all 21 railway employees. The findings, the authors say, "indicate that individual memory distortions shared by a large number of people develop into collective false memories".

The stopped clock become iconic, widely reproduced in the media and used on posters and banners at the annual commemoration. The clock's symbolism probably helped obscure the real experience by acting on the more 'fragile' memory when recalled or forming part of the schema used to encode memories. <sup>17</sup>



## **MEMORY HACKS**

Whatever our brains can do, scientists can try to do better: numerous studies show that false memories are relatively easy to implant and are largely indistinguishable from genuine ones. Researchers can, for instance, implant false childhood memories in about a third to half of adults, including: nearly drowning and being rescued by a lifeguard; being admitted to a hospital at four years of age with low blood sugar; spilling drink over a bride's dress; being attacked by a vicious animal; or seeing a ghost. Researchers even implanted impossible childhood memories, such as hugging Bugs Bunny – a Warner Brother's character – at Disneyland.

Memory hacks are not limited to childhood recollections. Researchers implanted memories convincing people that during the last visit to the laboratory a few days earlier, they had tossed a coin, kissed a plastic frog or rubbed chalk





**LEFT:** The home of Charles Lindbergh during a police reconstruction of his son's kidnapping in 1932; a ladder was leant against the nursery window to simulate the kidnapper's method of entry. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Bruno Richard Hauptmann was the real culprit, but some 200 innocent people confessed to the crime

into their foreheads. In one study of 187 undergraduates, "simple, single page-long" false feedback was used to implant false memories of committing or being the victim of aggression. About one in five (17.9%) falsely remembered having a black eye after being punched, two in five (40.5%) that they had punched someone, causing a black eye, and three in five (58.1%) that they had spread malicious gossip. Men were more likely to recall causing a black eye than were women (60% as opposed to 34.4%) and less likely to falsely remember spreading malicious gossip (28.3% compared to 66.7% of women).

In other words, people were more likely to falsely remember being aggressive than being a victim. The researchers say that false aggressive memories "were all too easy to implant, particularly in the minds of individuals with a proclivity towards aggression." <sup>18</sup> And that leads to a worrying question: what about people jailed after confessing to a crime they never committed because of a false memory?

## **I CONFESS**

BIPS / HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

Some memories of a crime – eyewitness testimonies, for example – are notoriously unreliable. One study of people convicted of a crime but exonerated by DNA evidence found that about three-quarters involved eyewitness misidentification. More than a third (38%) involved multiple eyewitnesses misidentifying the same innocent person. On average, the innocent person spent 12 years in prison. <sup>19</sup>

Eyewitnesses may misremember a cleanshaven man with a moustache, straight hair as curly, and even a barn in a picture of a rural scene that did not contain any buildings. Between 1979 and 1981, the Trailside Killer raped and murdered women in parks near San Francisco. The

## "Many sad crazies inevitably come forward in a high-profile case"

local sheriff collected several eyewitness accounts of the victims being seen with "strange men just before their deaths", which differed in several details, including the supposed killer's age and facial features.<sup>20</sup>

According to pioneering FBI criminal profiler John Douglas, "many sad crazies... inevitably come forward in a high-profile case." Innocent people voluntarily confess because of, for instance, a pathological need for attention, self-punishment, feelings of guilt, a tangible gain, to protect someone or to escape the anxiety and insecurity caused by the interrogation. But some people – we don't know exactly how many – make false confessions because they genuinely, and wrongly, believe they've committed a crime.

Certainly, people falsely confess to the most heinous crimes. Charles Augustus Lindbergh Jr – the 20-month-old son of the famous aviator – was kidnapped on 1 March 1932 from the nursery on the first floor of the family's New Jersey home. The kidnapper left a ransom note demanding \$50,000 on the nursery window sill. On 12 May 1932, the baby's body was accidentally found, partly buried and badly decomposed, about four and a half miles from the house. The autopsy revealed that a blow to the head had killed Charles about two months

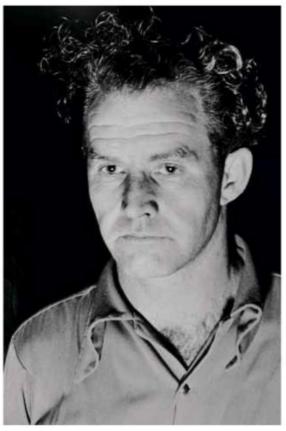
previously. Caught after a nationwide manhunt, Bruno Richard Hauptmann received the death penalty. In the meantime, some 200 people had confessed to the kidnapping. <sup>21</sup>

On 15 January 1947, a mother taking her child for a walk in Los Angeles found the naked body of 22-year-old Elizabeth Ann Short, an aspiring actress. According to the FBI, the murderer cut Elizabeth in two "around the waist with a very sharp instrument" and removed a breast. The cut, even through the backbone, was "very cleanly done – none of the internal organs being touched except to sever the intestines". A letter from the FBI Los Angeles field office to the forensic laboratory reports that "there is some speculation that the murderer has had some training in dissection of bodies." 22 More than 50 men and women confessed to the Black Dahlia murder. But, despite intense speculation, the culprit has never been definitely identified.

Torture may also lead to false confessions. Even at the time, Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins was accused of "unlawfull courses of torture" which meant his victims would "say anything for ease and quiet". Hopkins typically deprived those accused of witchcraft of sleep, made them walk until their feet blistered and "put words in suspects' mouths". <sup>23</sup> Sleep deprivation can make people more suggestible to leading questions and helps encode false and distorted memories. Hopkins's interrogation probably implanted false memories of a nocturnal liaison with the Devil in the minds of some 'witches'.

Civil authorities have abandoned the thumbscrews. But a police interrogation generally presupposes guilt and the police are authority figures. Suspects are isolated from friends, family and other sources of





ABOVE: The notorious 'Black Dahlia' murder of 1947 remains unsolved, but more than 50 people confessed to the grisly killing, including Daniel S Voorhees.

social support. <sup>24</sup> Not surprisingly, a police interrogation – even if you are innocent – is usually highly stressful, even terrifying. The pressure may, of course, shake a confession from the guilty. But some innocent people believe that the short-term benefits of confession outweigh the long-term costs, just like their ancestors accused of witchcraft.

Yet, as Stephen Porter and Alysha Baker note: "Most would find it hard to believe that people could misremember committing a serious crime, much less with such conviction that they would confess to it". 25 But interrogators can use the widespread belief that we often repress trauma against people who claim that they don't remember committing a crime. The accused may be willing to believe that they repressed their memories of committing aggressive or criminal acts. This, in turn, could forge a false memory, especially if the suspect is highly suggestible. We've already seen that false aggressive memories are easy to implant in people "with a proclivity towards aggression". Aggressive individuals are more likely to be arrested and interrogated and are especially prone to form violent false memories, partly because it fits their selfimage.

False memories of a crime may even be easier to implant than those for non-criminal events. One study used information that researchers claimed came from a family member to try to convince 30 students that they'd committed a crime between the ages of 11 and 14 years that involved the police. After three interviews, 21 (70%) had false memories of committing a crime: eight provided accounts involving assault, seven falsely recalled assaulting someone using a weapon and six recalled stealing. Eleven participants who had false memories of assault with or without a weapon described police contact, such as the officer's physical

appearance. On average, they recalled about 12 details of the police contact. Two participants with false memories of a theft reported the police encounter, recalling about four specific details. Researchers also tried to implant false memories about noncriminal events in another 30 students. They succeeded in three-quarters (77%), implanting false memories of animal attacks, accidents resulting in an injury, and losing a large amount of money. The recollections were similarly detailed irrespective of whether they were false recollections or true memories. <sup>26</sup>

These examples barely scratch the surface. But memories are clearly a long way from always being reliable "indelible portraits of our past". False memories have implications for how we view confessions and eyewitness testimony in court, how we evaluate conspiracies or how we investigate fortean phenomena. But even for those of us who had yet to take an interplanetary trip, false memories may profoundly influence our self-image. It seems much that we take for granted stands on rather flimsy foundations.

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- **MARK GREENER** is a Cambridge-based medical writer and the clinical editor of *Pharmacy Magazine*. He writes regularly for a number of publications, including *Fortean Times*.

## ALIFE IN PRINT

## PART TWO - THE NINETIES

Having retired as FT's longtime 'newsman', co-founding editor **PAUL SIEVEKING** looks back at another decade of service on *Fortean Times*, and presents some of his highlights from the 1990s – including a talking cat, bees paying their last respects and milk-drinking Hindu idols.

...As I was saying [FT390:43], in 1991 Bob Rickard and I made a deal with John Brown to publish *Fortean Times* for the news trade. Circulation rocketed from 2,100 for the last "home-grown" issue (FT57, April 1991) to 18,600 (FT58, July 1991).

The first issue in the current A4 format was FT63 (June 1992), featuring a cover photo of T Lobsang Rampa, "the Plumber from Plympton who became the Lama from Lhasa". At first, the magazine was bi-monthly, but changed to monthly after FT85 in February 1996, when the circulation briefly (and unsustainably) topped 60,000, boosted by the massive popularity of *The X-Files* on television. That was when Etienne Gilfillan became our art director, and there was now full colour throughout the magazine. David Sutton joined the Gang of Fort as picture researcher with FT128 in November 1999.

In December 1992, I started Sidelines [FT66:9], to accommodate strange news stories that could be told in 90 words or less (a sort of proto-tweet). By the time I retired as FT newsman last year, I had written more than 6,500 of these. Here are some of the first examples:

- "Zucchini and eggplants are both stuffed with rice," said an Egyptian fundamentalist leader recently, "and the stuffing process, which is usually done by women, leads to arousal. It is better to prohibit the sale of these vegetables to avoid a greater danger." Newsweek, 27 June 1992.
- A doctor has told Kenyans who wash their genitals with battery acid after sex as a preventative to AIDS that the end result could be "even more disastrous". [AFP] 2 Oct 1992.
- A suspicious-looking cardboard box was found outside a Territorial Army centre in Bristol. The TA called the police, who called the Army bomb disposal unit, which blew the box up to find it full of leaflets on how to deal with suspicious-looking packages. *Independent*, 20 Jan 1993.









• A naked man running across New York's Brooklyn Bridge singing "On what a beautiful morning!" was run over by a car and killed. *D.Mirror*, 18 May 1993.

In February 1991, through the good offices of Mat Coward (then 'London Spy' on Midweek magazine), I began a weekly column in the New Statesman entitled 'Forteana'. In 1996, after writing 249 columns, I was poached by Dominic Lawson for the Sunday *Telegraph*, where my next 322 columns were called 'Strange But True', and were illustrated with drawings by Steven Appleby. For a decade I turned out 650 words every week, never missing a deadline (although my column following the terror attacks of 9/11 was spiked). One column in 1997 was hand-written in a London hospital kitchen, following a stroke I suffered in Paris. Editor Lawson spiked my column permanently in 2002, and three years later he was spiked in turn by the Barclay twins, the Telegraph Group's new owners. In my final column I mused: "Over the last six years I have brought you talking trees and weeping icons, inept crooks and prodigious gluttons, ghostly smells and mys**LEFT:** FT in the 1990s – The first A4 issue (**FT63**); the first appearance of Sidelines (**FT66**); Etienne Gilfillan delivers the first all-colour issue (**FT85**); David Sutton joins the Gang of Fort (**FT128**).

tery hums, explorers' phantom companions, testifying parrots and drunken elephants, flying manhole covers, timeslips and midday panics, vampire kangaroos and underground fires, alien big cats and lake monsters."

Here are a few news stories I wrote up for Strange Days during the last decade of the second millennium AD.

### **STORIES FROM THE NINETIES**

- In 1990, Adrian Brown from Winton in Dorset was working for a security firm, driving round to check on various sites. He ran to a strict timetable, but one night, on his way to a gravel pit, he was delayed by 20 minutes. At a roundabout near Holton Heath (not far from Wareham), lit up in the headlights of a lorry, he saw a white van identical to his, with the same black lettering on the side. The driver turned towards him and he saw that it was himself. Stunned and frightened, he drove on, checked the site and went home. It occurred to him that his double was at the exact spot he would have been - and had been every night for five months - if he hadn't been late. Dorset Advertiser, 3 Nov 1994. [FT79:14]
- On 5 June 1990, Charlie Osborne of Anthon, Iowa, stopped hiccupping, after doing so continuously for 68 years. His cure came following three days of "fierce praying" by his daughter. The hiccupping had begun in 1922 when Charlie was trying to attach a dead hog to a tree branch. *Omaha World-Herald*, 17 Mar 1991. [FT59:35]
- During the filming of *Suicide Commando*, Turkish actor Sönmez Yikilmaz slept in a tent with the film crew. One night, a black snake crawled into the tent and into Mr Yikilmaz through his open mouth. An X-ray showed that the snake was alive in his stomach. He was hung upside down from a tree with a pot

of steaming milk below him on the ground. The smell of the hot milk lured the snake out. *Bugün (Turkey)*, 29 July 1991. [FT70:16]

- A hazard unique to Venezuelan highways last century was a slippery goo called *La* Mancha Negra (the black stain), which was actually more of a sludge with the consistency of chewing gum. Although the government spent millions of dollars in research, no one discovered what the goo was, where it came from, or how to get rid of it. It first appeared in 1987 on the road from Caracas to the airport, covering 150ft (46m), and spread inexorably every year. By 1992, it was a major road hazard all around the capital and 1,800 motorists had reportedly died after losing control. Our last news about this was 20 years ago, so we don't know if the phenomenon has ceased. Providence Sunday Journal (Rhode Island), 9 Aug 1992; [R] 3 April 2001. [FT67:16, 149:28]
- The lead story of Turkish television news on 20 March 1993 was a talking cat called Cingene (Gypsy), living in Izmir. The twoyear-old feline was heard to say Ver (give), Nalan (a girl's name), Derva (another girl's name), Demem (I don't say), Naynay (baby talk for music), Nine (colloquial word for grandmother) and Babaanne (formal word for grandmother). FT correspondent Izzet Goksu told us these words were clearly audible. Another talking Turkish cat called Pala was reported back in 1968. Pala could say Anne (mother), Baba (father), Abla (elder sister) and *Kamile* (the name of the owner's wife). As I commented: "Perhaps cats all over the world are talking Turkish, and we just don't notice." Harriyet, Bugün (Turkey), 27 Mar 1993. [FT72:16]
- In April 1992, someone broke into two stone coffins in a chapel in Wotton, Surrey, cut open the lead linings, decapitated the famous diarist John Evelyn (died 1706) and his wife Mary (died 1709), and made off with their heads. The bodies were quite well preserved. To date, the heads have not been recovered. *News of the World*, 5 *April 1992*. [FT66:17]
- At 1,000ft (300m) and preparing for a routine landing over Bouloc in south-west France, parachutist Didier Dahran, 27, was swept upwards by a freak cyclone. His wrist altimeter soared to 25,000ft (7,620m) before jamming. Soaked by rain and struggling to breathe in the thinning air, his face and hands froze in temperatures of minus 30°C (minus 22°F). Two hours after the jump, at the kind of altitude usually reached only by jet airliners, his parachute collapsed, sending him plummeting. He launched his emergency chute and passed out, landing heavily in twilight 30 miles (48km) from where he had jumped. He suffered no broken bones, but was hospitalised with severe frostbite and shock. Mail on Sunday, 23 May 1993. [**FT76:11**]



**ABOVE:** A devotee offers milk to Hindu god Ganesh 23 September 1995 in Dhaka after the phenomenon of "milk-drinking" idols spread to Bangladesh from India. **BELOW:** Gloria Ramirez, the 'toxic woman' whose death was a major mystery in 1994. **BOTTOM:** A leaflet promoting the millennial 'White Brotherhood' cult.





• In the summer of 1993, a millennial cult called *Belye Bratya* ('White Brotherhood')

- led by Marina Tsvygun, 33, calling herself Maria Devi Christos, Final Incarnation of God on Earth – declared that the world would end on 24 November 1993 (subsequently brought forward to 14 November). Devotees were forbidden money, television, computers, jobs and education, regarding bar codes as the Mark of the

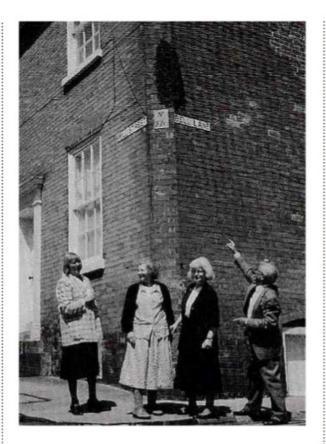
Beast. Thousands of posters of Tsvygun were plastered over the walls of St Petersburg, and on 10 November she was jailed in Kiev, Ukraine, with her second husband, Yuri Krivonogov, after followers had sprayed foam on icons in the 11th century St Sophia's cathedral, the Orthodox Slav world's holiest church, while chanting "Cursed is the Beast"; 570 followers were arrested, but a further 300 gathered in front of St Sophia's cathedral on 14 November, when the world was to end. Tsvygun was released from prison in 1997, while Krivonogov remained incarcerated. St Petersburg Press, 24-30 Aug; many papers, 11-15 Nov 1993; Western Morning News, 21 Aug 1997. [FT72:10, 73:6, 107:16]

• On 19 February 1994, cervical cancer sufferer Gloria Ramirez, 31, was rushed to Riverside General Hospital in California with chest pains, breathing difficulties and vomiting. An odd oily film was noted on her body, a blood sample appeared to contain white particles and there was an ammonia-like smell. Dr Julie Gorchynski and four nurses passed out. Ramirez died soon afterwards. Following the initial faintings, 23 people complained of at least one symptom - most commonly headache, dizziness and nausea. This was initially blamed on "mass sociogenic illness" - but Gorchynski and a nurse were in intensive care for over a week with breathing problems, sleep apnea and muscular spasms. Gorchynski's blood was found to contain white particles similar to those in the Ramirez blood sample. Months later, she was still very ill and had undergone three operations to try and save her knees because of bone necrosis.

Two autopsies on Ramirez failed to pinpoint the cause of the miasma and she was buried on 20 April. The official cause of death was kidney failure; the white particles and fumes remain unexplained. A laboratory report in November speculated that Ramirez

had used the black market analgesic DMSO (dimethyl sulphoxide) to facilitate ingestion of PCP ('angel dust') through her skin, which by a rare chain reaction in her body had created dimythyl sulphone, and then dimythyl sulphate, a chemical warfare agent – but an attempt to replicate this chain reaction failed, so the mystery remains. [AP] 21-26 Feb, 6+31 Mar, 3 April, 9 Aug; Austin (TX) American Statesman 20 Nov 1994; Channel 4 'Equinox', 26 Nov 1995. [FT75:42-43, 79:47, 89:17, 93:15]

- Margaret Bell, who kept bees in Leintwardine about seven miles from her home in Ludlow, Shropshire, died in June 1994. Soon after her funeral, mourners were astonished to see hundreds of bees settle on the corner of the street opposite the house where Mrs Bell had lived for 26 years. The bees stayed for about an hour before buzzing off over the rooftops. The South Shropshire Journal (24 June 1994) ran a photograph of the bees, hanging on the wall in a cluster. According to country lore, you should always tell the bees when someone has died so that they can pay their last respects. [FT78:10]
- A study of infrared satellite pictures of the otherwise featureless Nullarbor Plain in south central Australia showed a group of five parallel lines, 400km (248 miles) long, up to 15km (nine miles) wide and between 80km and 100km (49 and 62 miles) apart. They appear to be about two degrees Celsius cooler than the surrounding plain during daytime. The origin and nature of this planetary bar code were unknown. New Scientist, 3 Sept 1994. [FT78:49]
- A noise a bit like amplifier feedback had been heard for three years coming from the right ear of a five-year-old Welsh pony called Misty, according to the Veterinary Record (April 1995). It could be heard from 3ft (90cm) away, and varied in intensity, but stayed at a constant pitch of 7 kilohertz. Hearing a buzzing in one's ears is called subjective tinnitus; very much rarer is when other people can hear the noise, a condition called objective tinnitus, the cause of which is a matter of debate. [FT83:10]
- On 21 September 1995, Delhi and much of northern India ran short of milk after rumours that idols of Hindu gods – in particular Shiva, Ganesh and Parvati – were drinking it. The Indian stock exchanges closed down and riot police beat back the crowds. The craze was allegedly started by saddhus in Haridwar the day before to protect the notorious "greaseball guru" Chandraswami, who had been arrested for harbouring a homicidal gangster. The next day, the milk phenomenon had spread to Calcutta, Madras, Singapore, Hong Kong and right round the world from Kenya to Toronto, Bangkok to Brisbane, Dubai to Jersey City, and across England from Southall to Birmingham. Two days later, the idols seemed



## You should always tell the bees when someone has died so they can pay their last respects

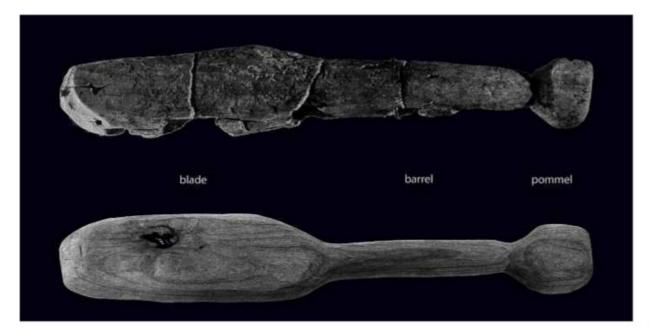
to have had their fill of milk, but the appetite allegedly spread to statues of the Virgin Mary in Runcorn and Kuala Lumpur. Many papers, 21-27 Sept 1995; Times, 7 May 1996. [FT84:16-17, 91:15]

- Reports of a red-eyed monster called Chupacabras (goatsucker), that ripped the organs from livestock, were rife in Puerto Rico in late 1995. The daily tabloid *El Vocaro* reported that Chupacabras "sucked dead" five goats and 20 parakeets on Hallowe'en. Similar reports had surfaced in Puerto Rico since the 1970s, and Chupacabras scarelore spread across the southern US states after 1995. NY Daily News, 22 Nov 1995. [FT85:9]
- Vicky Wilmore, 10, from Gorton, Greater Manchester, started mirror writing – with letters and numbers upside down and back-to-front - on 12 October 1994 after complaining of a headache. Only she could read what she wrote, and soon her writing degenerated into squiggles. On 27 September 1995, while watching Manchester United on television, she jumped up and fell backwards, banging her head on a table. The next day, she could read and write normally again. *Times, D.Telegraph, 7 Dec* 1995. [**FT86:6**]
- At 6.30pm on 17 May 1996, Ruth Harnett of Hatfield in Hertfordshire heard a loud thump

LEFT: In June 1994, a swarm of bees appeared to settle on a house in Ludlow to pay their last respects to beekeeper Margaret Bell.

on her van's roof and found a medium-sized fish. Looking up, she saw another coming towards her, which hit the van's bonnet. It was not raining, but the temperature had suddenly dropped. Three more fish landed in her garden and one hit her in the face. Local children came running up, and witnessed about 20 more fish falling. Up to 5in (13cm) long, they were thought to be young roach, rud or dab and weighed about 4lb (1.8kg) in total. Mrs Harnett told FT they seemed fresh and warm to the touch. [FT89:7]

- In July 1996, Peter Doden was walking his dog in Wakerley Woods, Northamptonshire, when he came upon an elderly gentleman sitting up a tree, who asked: "Have you a spare sandwich or anything?" Doden threw him a chocolate bar, which he ate, wrapper and all, before revealing he had been up the tree for a fortnight. "I set out to join those tree sitters in Sussex protesting about a new road," he said, "but when I reached Wakerley Woods, I felt rather tired and decided to lodge my protest in this tree instead." Doden pointed out that Sussex was 150 miles (240km) to the south, and that in any case the tree protesters were long gone. "Damn it all," exclaimed the eco-warrior, "They might have told me!" Weekend Telegraph, 3 Aug 1996. [FT98:10]
- A menhir on Exmoor exploded in October 1996. The 6ft (1.8m), three-ton megalith was thought to have been struck by lightning. Sizable pieces of stone were thrown more than 60ft (18m) by the explosion. It was suggested the stone or surrounding bedrock might have contained particular minerals that made it a 'magnet' for the lightning. This is the first recorded case of its kind. Archæologist Simon Timms noted: "It is most odd – particularly when there is a 60ft [18m] tree standing only 20 yards [18m] away, which should have been an obvious target for the lightning." Western Daily Press, 27 Dec 1996, *North Devon Journal*, 2 *Jan* 1997. [**FT103:10**]
- A supermarket checkout worker was left with a 3in (7cm) scar on her bottom after her knickers spontaneously combusted. Melanie Thompson, 25, said the Marks & Spencer knickers caught fire while she was at the till of the Co-op hypermarket in Hindley, Lancashire. She rushed to the loo, peeled off the smouldering underwear and doused it with water. M&S tested the £6.50 polyamide, polyester and Lycra garment, but said that no fault was found. Thompson was not smoking, nor were there any naked flames nearby. "I thought I had been stung by a bee," she said. A fire expert discounted the most obvious theory: that the knickers caught fire because friction caused a build-up of static. D.Mail, 15 Aug 1997. [FT104:7]





**ABOVE LEFT:** The baseball bat-like object recovered from Thames mud in 1998; it has since become known as the 'London Beater'. **ABOVE RIGHT:** In trying to ascertain his identity, police released this photo of the mysterious 'Mr Patel' found dead in a Torquay hotel in 1997 and who may have been a Tamil Tiger.

• On 24 September 1997, the manager of the Grand Hotel in Torquay, Devon, entered Room 131 to find the naked body of a man on the bed, surrounded by hundreds of pounds in cash. The dead man was of south Indian or Sri Lankan apperance, in his 30s, with a heavily pockmarked face and two transverse surgical scars on each shoulder. He had checked in the previous day as "Mr Patel" of "Beaston Flats, Green Lanes, north London". an address that proved to be imaginary. There was nothing to identify him. Four months later, the police announced that he had died of cyanide poisoning. Alongside a coffee cup with cyanide-contaminated dregs was a note reading: "I'm very sorry for what I have done here, but this is the place I had to carry out the deed." Curiously, the body was found a few feet from where Agatha Christie (one of whose books was called Sparkling Cyanide) spent her wedding night on Christmas Eve 1914.

The inquest in October 1998 was told that worldwide enquiries had failed to identify the man, but a Home Office pathologist from Sri Lanka said that the shoulder scars were tribal marks indicating he was a Tamil Tiger. "They always carry a cyanide pill around with them," he said. "You will never find out who he is." (Or why he came to Torquay to top himself.) Eve. Standard, 13 Nov 1997, Sunday Telegraph, 25 Jan 1998, Times, 22 Oct 1998. [FT110:16, 118:25]

• While on holiday, a woman, referred to in the *British Medical Journal* #315 (Dec 1997) as AB, heard two voices in her head, telling her to return home immediately. Back in London, the voices gave her an address that turned out to be a hospital's brain scan department. They told her to ask for a scan as she had a brain tumour and her brain stem was inflamed. Though she had no symptoms, Ikechukwu Azuonyea, a psychiatrist from Lambeth Healthcare NHS Trust, reluctantly agreed to a scan – and she did indeed have a tumour. After an operation in May 1984, AB heard the voices again. "We are pleased to have helped you," they said.

"Goodbye." AB made a full recovery and never heard the voices again. [FT108:6]

- Albert and Betty Cheetham, dining in the Tourkhalf Hotel in Sousse, Tunisia, found themselves sitting next to Albert and Betty Rivers. It turned out that both couples had been married at 2pm on 15 August 1942. Each had two sons born in 1943 and 1945, and five grandchildren. Mr Cheetham, 77, had worked in the railway couch-building industry in Derby; Mr Rivers, 76, was in the same industry in Swindon, Wiltshire. Their wives had both worked for the Post Office; both had lost their engagement rings and were wearing identical 1930 watch bracelets that had been broken and repaired at the same point. Both couples had booked their holidays in Sousse at the same time and had flown there on the same day. D. Telegraph, 4 Feb 1998. [**FT111:19**]
- The "cricket bat" fashioned from a fossil elephant bone and found near Piltdown man's remains was a hoax [FT62:24-30]; however, an oak 'bat' found in Thames mud at Chelsea, just below the usual low-water mark near some ancient fishing stakes, was a genuine antiquity. Carbon-dated to between 3,540 BC and 3,360 BC, the 30in (76cm) bat has a rounded handle with a baseball battype knob at the end. Surrounding it were stone axes and the remains of a prehistoric forest. *Guardian*, 4 July 1998. [FT115:23]
- While holidaying near Blewsbury, Berkshire, in 1978, Alec Martin of Bolton, Lancashire, looked down from a small hill on a field of cows. The herd dispersed to the edge and started trotting round the perimeter in single file, first clockwise, then anti-clockwise. Then the cows at the corners of the field trotted in a straight line to the diagonally opposite corner. Finally, several cows paired up to circle each other in different corners, the whole effect appearing symmetrical. They seemed to be doing a barn dance. *D.Mail*, 25 June 1998. [FT116:21]

- While fishing with friends off Cairns on the north-east coast of Australia in 1992, backpacker Nigel Shepherd wrote "Bestow good luck to whoever finds this note from Pommie Shep" on a piece of paper. He pushed the note into a Dogbolter beer bottle, sealed it with a cork from a wine bottle, and threw it in the sea. Six years later, Nigel, 36, was walking along the beach at Hayling Island in Hampshire, a few miles from his home, when he came upon a Dogbolter bottle lying in the sand. It had his note inside so he had "bestowed good luck" on himself. Could the bottle have bobbed 12,000 miles (19,300km) from Down Under? Times, 18 April; Sunday Mirror, 22 May 1998. [FT118:8]
- In July 1996, an off-duty policeman named Frank went shopping with his wife Carol in Liverpool city centre. Carol went to Dillon's bookshop in Bold Street and Frank went to get a CD in Ranelagh Street. About 20 minutes later, he walked to Bold Street to meet his wife, and as he strolled up the incline from Central Station he noticed an unusual quietness. The road was cobbled and people were wearing clothes from the 1950s. He was startled by a loud horn, and a box van with the name Caplan's on its side sped past, narrowly missing him. Crossing the road, he saw that in place of Dillon's was a large store with the name Cripps over its two entrances, with a window display of women's handbags and shoes. He noticed a young woman dressed in the clothes of the mid-Nineties – hipsters and a sleeveless top – carrying a bag from Miss Selfridge. She entered Cripps looking baffled, and suddenly the whole street scene reverted to 1996. Frank asked her if she too had seen the same things he had seen; she said she had, and seemed frightened. It turned out that a store called Cripps had indeed stood on the site of Dillon's in the 1950s. Journalist Tom Slemen told this story on local radio, prompting several listeners to ring in to say they too had experienced time slips in that part of Bold Street. Merseymart, 10 June 1999. [FT126:9]



## POLITICAL PANACEAS

As politicians struggle to cope with the coronavirus pandemic's relentless global spread, **SD TUCKER** finds that some leaders' autonomic immune response is to bury their heads in the sand...

hen in late April it was reported that Donald Trump had advised worried Americans to inject themselves with disinfectant to combat Covid-19, the lying fake-news media suggested that, of all political leaders in the world, the US President was handling the coronavirus crisis the most ineptly. Really? Trump may not have covered himself in glory, but certain others have done far, far worse. Even in the US itself, Trump's fellow Republican, Ohio representative Nino Vitale, has refused to obey the order of his own State Governor for shoppers to wear masks on the grounds that "everyone else's freedom starts at the tip of my nose" and that it is not "the role of government to protect us from death, which is inevitable". And given that we are all created in the image of God - as "seen the most by our face", which is "the image of God right there" - covering his own divine visage with a mask would have been a kind of sacrilege, Vitale argued. He has also posted online his view that Bill Gates created the virus in the first place, hoping to thereby "profit by charging us for mandatory vaccinations". 1

According to other highly dubious online rumours, meanwhile, North Korea's leaders had developed a foolproof way of ensuring that their coronavirus death-rate remained at zero – by shooting patients before they could die of it. Those who die with coronavirus rather than of it need not necessarily be included in final statistics, and a bullet to the head is surely the best way to achieve this aim. <sup>2</sup> As for inconsistency of response, Trump was easily outdone by Chechyan strongman Ramzan Kadyrov, whose initial 11 March medical advice was to channel Franklin D Roosevelt by saying that fear itself was the truly deadly thing; unlike FDR, he also advised drinking lemon-juice laced with honey and eating garlic to boost immunesystems with "clean blood". By 27 March, when the first deaths in Chechnya had been reported, he was changing tack, arguing that those who spread the virus around carelessly were "worse than terrorists" and should be thrown into a big pit to die. By 29 March, a lockdown was in place and masked police were wandering the streets beating people with large plastic pipes if they didn't comply. This is in contrast to their



ABOVE: A man plays the accordian to an audience

## CORONAVIRUS CAN BE PREVENTED BY EXPOSURE TO **TRACTORS**



of dummies at a Belarussian football match. BELOW: President Lukashenko remains uncowed by Covid-19.

initial role of hunting down those spreading 'rumours' (i.e. facts) about Covid-19's presence and forcing them to issue public apologies. "Everyone will eventually die," Kadyrov had earlier reassured his people – at least if he has anything to do with it. 3

## THE PRESIDENT'S FARMER-COPOEIA

Another popular response of autocrats is simply to deny that there is any problem at all, as adopted by a group dubbed the 'Ostrich Alliance' by Brazilian academic Oliver Stuenkel. Chief Ostrich is Belarussian dictator and former collective farm manager Alexander Lukashenko, who has complained about a "coronavirus psychosis" gripping the world and refused to implement any true lockdown on the grounds that, as Trump has also fretted, it would leave his economy "crippled... and then what would we eat, huh?" - which, to be fair, is true.

Less true are Lukashenko's other musings on coronavirus, such as that it can be cured or prevented via simple exposure to tractors. Belarus was famed for its tractor production during Soviet times, with Minsk still being a leading producer of such vehicles, as is evidently celebrated in national media. "It's nice watching television," said Lukashenko

in March, as it broadcast relaxing images of "people working in tractors" in which "no-one is talking about the virus". Why not? Because, it seems, "the tractor will heal everyone, [working in] the fields heals everyone." Belarussian TV is also currently broadcasting live footage of football games, theirs being the only European league not to have closed down, together with icehockey tournaments in which Lukashenko himself competes (and generally wins). Such mass gatherings pose no danger, the President explained, as: "Sport... is the best anti-virus medicine," particularly ones like ice-hockey which take place in a giant "fridge" in which diseases cannot live. "Did you see any of them flying around?" he asked in one post-match interview. "I don't."

Becoming an alcoholic is another sure-fire way to die of something other than Covid-19. "I don't drink," Lukashenko has said, "but recently I've been saying that people should not only wash their hands with vodka but also poison the virus with it. You should drink the equivalent of 40-50 millilitres of rectified spirit daily. But not at work." Then you might crash your tractor. Going to the sauna before washing out your insides is another good medical tactic, as is petting baby goats. Widely criticised for such advice (outside Belarus, at least), Lukashenko has since claimed his suggestions were just jokes. "No-one will die in our country of coronavirus. I publicly guarantee this," he said in April – and, by his reasoning, they still haven't. To Lukashenko, Covid-19 only finishes off people who were going to die soon anyway; it doesn't kill them on its own. Thus, when faced with news of various victims, he has publicly blamed and shamed them for their own deaths, accusing them of being too fat or old to go on living: "If somebody's going to turn 80 tomorrow, then why are you walking around on the street? ... How can you keep living if your weight is 135 kilogrammes?" Anyhow, "It's better to die on your feet than live on your knees," Lukashenko argues, a sentiment echoed by compliant media in lines such as "Belarus is not a hysterical young lady who covers her face with a mask." Some basic public-health guidelines like "do not rub against each other" have been issued, but life in Belarus carries on almost as normal, making the small number of reported deaths there seem highly surprising – until you remember

that an 'election' [sic]

is due in August, and

Lukashenko

media. 4

controls the



**ABOVE:** Believers pray without social distancing during a Palm Sunday mass in Dar es Salaam. **BELOW:** President Magufili has allowed places of worship to stay open – as well as recommending the use of onions.

### STRANGE FRUIT

One way of warding off coronavirus that long-time Miss World fan Donald Trump might approve of was suggested by King Amon N'Douffou V, traditional chief of the native Ivory Coast sub-kingdom of Sanwi, who has revealed that Covid-19 is in fact a "bad spirit", and that, as such, holding a mass-parade of naked women might scare it away (see p.4). <sup>5</sup>

Even less credible are the beliefs of another African leader, President John Magufuli of Tanzania. Known as 'The Bulldozer' due to his robust methods of cutting national expenditure – which have included sweeping roads clean with a broom himself, encouraging the police to steal and sell on car tyres from illegally parked vehicles and rejecting a "killer Chinese loan" on the grounds that "only a drunkard" would accept its poor terms – Magufuli has bet his chances of re-election on fostering a growing economy and a lean State, both of which are threatened by the coronavirus. As such, his response has been to refuse most lockdown measures as financially ruinous

and begin promoting a series of bizarre but coincidentally cheap non-cures to solve the problem instead. Praying, for example, is free, so, while banning some mass gatherings, the Catholic Magufuli has allowed churches, mosques and other such places of "true healing" to remain open, on the grounds that Covid-19 is "the Devil", and that as "it cannot live in the

body of Christ, it will burn instantly" in the bodies of attendees. In April, he called for three days of national prayer to exorcise the virus from the land. Anything which might cost public money, however, is to be condemned as "stupidity" and "total bullshit" – including facemasks, test-kits and disinfectant sprays. When hearing antiseptic had been sprayed across the chief commercial city of Dar es Salaam by local authorities, he was outraged: "What if [the spray] has coronavirus in it?"

ERICKY BONIPHACE / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGE

Official advice from The Bulldozer is for citizens to rely on inexpensive traditional herbal remedies such as mwarubaini, which involves boiling leaves with onions before inhaling their steam: "This is a scientific thing, steam above 100°C temperature can blow up that virus. Those using onions and mwarubaini, please go on." A former science teacher and industrial chemist, Magufuli knows what he is talking about, especially when it comes to Covid-19 testing-kits, which he says do not work. Allegedly fond of disguising himself as an ordinary voter to inspect public offices for waste before sacking spendthrift officials on the spot, Magufuli hatched a plot to send out fake non-human test-samples to a lab to see what would happen. Thus, a sample of "vehicleoil labelled Jabir Hamza aged 30 years, male, tested negative. A jackfruit sample which we named Sara Samweli, 45 years old, female - results inconclusive. When we sent a papaya [paw-paw fruit] sample and named it Elizabeth Anne, aged 26 years, that papaya was positive!" Samples from birds, goats and rabbits were also not noticed, which led to the lab's head being suspended: that's one less parasite on the public pay-

## STRANGE STATESMEN #38



**ABOVE:** The President of Madagascar, Andry Rajoelina, holds up his "Covid Organics" cure at a launch in April. **BELOW:** High school students dutifully quaff bottles of the wonder-tonic doled out to them at the start of classes.

roll. Footage of secret nocturnal burials taking place has now gone viral on social media, leading to rumours of a cover-up of Tanzania's true death-rate. The Bulldozer himself has spent much of the crisis holed up in his home-village of Chato rather than the capital, Dodoma, but any nervous MPs who follow his example by self-isolating, following the deaths of three colleagues, will have their allowances withdrawn, aiding Tanzania's necessary thrift even further. President Magufuli is very good at saving taxpayers' money; taxpayers' lives, rather less so. 6

## **MARVELLOUS MEDICINE**

RIJASOLO / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

One thing Magufuli is willing to splash cash on is a planeload of a new wonder-tonic from Madagascar named Covid-Organics, as promoted by the island nation's President, media tycoon Andry Rajoelina. Rajoelina appeared on TV on 8 April, announcing he had received a letter from someone who had discovered a possible cure for coronavirus, which could "change the course of history". He gave few details until, on Easter Sunday, he tweeted that the panacea was "an enhanced traditional remedy" made of native Malagasy plants, the primary one of which later turned out to be artemisia, an ingredient in certain anti-malarial treatments. Madagascar has the world's largest supply of this plant, so bottling its extract as coronavirus medicine could really help out a nation with only six ventilators for 27 million people.

Sceptics were reassured by a documentary broadcast by one of Rajoelina's TV channels on 16 April in which a Brazilian prophetess was revealed to have flown over the island in November 2019 (in a plane, just to be clear), with her route taking the shape of Christ's cross, before being inspired to utter the following prophecy: "The world will

soon experience a terrible pandemic. But Madagascar will hold the cure." This proved Rajoelina's "intuition" that Madagascar had been "chosen by God" to save humanity.

A massive State-funded production programme of Covid-Organics was ordered, with the bottled herbal tea drink offering an easy route out of lockdown. Scientists spent "over a month" developing the cure and, after it was tested on as many as 20 people, none of whom died after drinking it, schools were allowed to re-open provided pupils agreed to drink preventative doses scooped from large buckets; meanwhile, armed soldiers dished it out for free to the poor and vulnerable door-to-door or in the streets in scenes likened to the druid Getafix spooning out magic potion from his cauldron. President Rajoelina has since begun exporting Covid-Organics all across

Africa, with profits going to a national medical research lab. As Madagascar is one of the very few places on Earth still to suffer regular outbreaks of bubonic plague, there is another cure they need urgently to perfect. <sup>7</sup>

## **LOVE IS THE DRUG**

Also claiming to have developed a coronavirus cure is Cuba, whose Communist leaders have opportunistically tried to plead for the lifting of US-led trade embargoes against it so it can export this alleged treatment, named Interferon alfa-2B, abroad. 8 This came as good news to the President of Nicaragua, former Marxist Sandinista rebel leader Daniel Ortega, and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, whose supporters have used news of the Cuban cure to argue against imposing lockdown in their country and thereby trashing the economy. Instead, the couple have actively encouraged mass gatherings to take place, from food festivals to beachside bikini-beauty contests and 'Zumbathons', culminating in a big street-parade, 'Love in the Time of Covid-19', in which workers manned floats brandishing banners reading 'Welcome, coronavirus, to a free Nicaragua!' - a Nicaragua so free that many participants were forced to attend.

To Ortega, coronavirus is a "sign from God" condemning US military imperialism; this is why the US is currently being the world's worst-affected nation, while Nicaragua itself is mercifully almost free from the disease... or so Ortega says. When he temporarily disappeared from view, rumour was he had it himself, but in truth he was just letting his First Lady rule in his stead, which she usually does from behind the scenes anyway. This is regrettable, as Rosario Murillo, known as 'The Witch' to detractors, is a New Age nutcase who genuinely believes the power of love alone



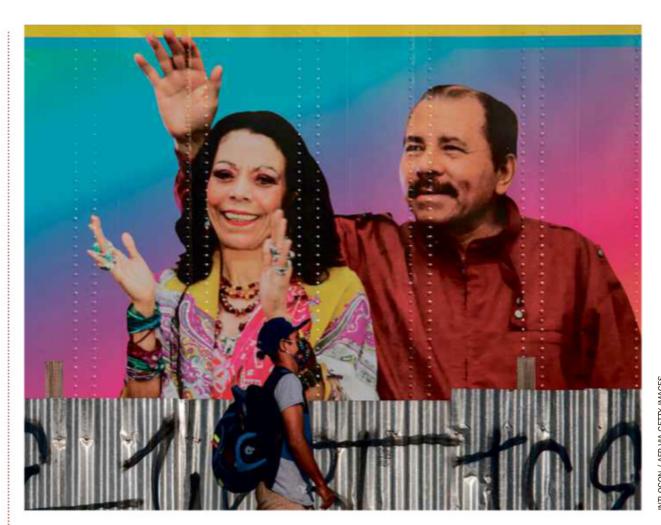
RIJASOLO / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

can save her people from death. A follower of the disgraced big-haired Indian guru and reputed gay rapist Sai Baba (see FT276:28-29), who styled himself an "avatar of God". Murillo has tried to make herself and her husband into similar national deities in Nicaragua: he is the new Christ, and she the second Virgin Mary, whose cloak can even protect her chosen people from earthquakes. The power couple's flagship micro-credit scheme was called 'In the Name of God!', thereby rendering any criticism of it blasphemous. The resurrected Christ himself has recently been seen sending "affectionate hugs" to his disciples from behind a TV screen - the only safe way in current circumstances.

Around the turn of the millennium, Murillo discovered a model elephant in her home, which she interpreted as a "binding object" teleported there for her by Baba, who was well-known for his ability to make luxury watches appear on his wrist from thin air. Proclaiming her allegiance, Murillo created a 22-page First Manifesto on the Power of Love, which she had distributed outside supermarkets. Within, she detailed her Baba-inspired plans for the future of Nicaraguan politics, which included creating 'Committees of Love' and a 'National Congress on the Power of Love', some of these ideas being expressed via the medium of poetry.

Since becoming VP, Murillo has altered the Sandinista colours (and her husband's clothing) to match Sai Baba's aura, which was white, pink, yellow and blue, apparently. As Nicaragua's usual presidential palace had "bad vibes" which caused previous occupants' children to die, Murillo has ensured she and Jesus rule from Sandinista HQ instead, where she has her husband receive diplomats in front of a large mural depicting a giant snake-encircled hand with an eyeball in the middle, to protect him from all baleful influences, viral or otherwise. When in the reception hall, some visitors are surprised to hear that they have already been 'seen' by Murillo without setting eyes on her; she views them clairvoyantly, and requests those with dirty-looking auras to go away and get them polished first. Murillo has also had dozens of bright, multicoloured 2-D plastic 'Trees of Life' installed across the capital Managua at the cost of several million dollars, for reasons that remain obscure. Possibly they will help draw down love from Heaven and ward off coronavirus.

Her interminable daily TV and radio speeches really do preach that love is the best way to defeat disease in "our Holy Nicaragua". On 28 March, she spoke of how "Good Feelings, Good Emotions and Great Hope" would help the populace pull through plague, with God himself desiring the economy be kept open, with the Deity currently "working in the Markets, in Commerce, in corner stores, in all the Small and Medium Businesses"



**ABOVE:** A man walks by a Managua mobile health clinic displaying a picture of Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega and his wife Vice-President Rosario Murillo against a backdrop with a cheerful Sai Baba-inspired colour scheme.

## ORTEGA IS THE NEW CHRIST AND SHE THE SECOND VIRGIN MARY

which lovingly continued to stay open at her husband's behest. All coronavirus cases were "imported" from capitalist lands abroad, she said, and diagnostic tests beneficently continued to be performed "on those who deserve it", not that these were really necessary, as citizens would continue feeling the blessing of God every morning "in the form of Energy" anyway, not to mention enjoying the regular "visits of our Love Brigades" to their houses. "Love in a big way" was always the best medicine, particularly in "these learning circumstances we are going through."

The national poetess finished by reciting the following lines of her own composition:

Let's listen, Brothers and Sisters, let it be heard,

The Song of Joy,
The Song of those who await the New Day!
We sing, sing, dream, singing,
Let's live dreaming of that New Sun
In which Men, Women,
Women, Men,
Will be brothers and sisters again.
We don't doubt it!

I do. According to reports, Jesus and Mary are hoping to break the infection chain themselves by self-isolating in their residence with 100 gallons of hand-sanitiser. With that much hand-washing going on, Ortega seems more likely to be the avatar of Pontius Pilate than Jesus Christ.

## **DENTAL HEALTH ISSUES**

If only there were some world leader out there with genuine medical qualifications to his name...

Step forward President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov of Turkmenistan. Sadly, the President's credentials are in dentistry, not virology, but fortunately Gurbanguly considers himself a genius, able to fly planes and drive tanks by innate instinct alone, and has in the past even performed operations to remove tumours from behind people's ears – dentistry and cancer surgery being basically just the same. The President is also the world's greatest expert on herbal medicine, whose multi-volume Medicinal *Plants of Turkmenistan* is considered the very best book about the topic ever written, and his solution to Covid-19 was to obliquely suggest that the native herb known as harmala or yuzarlik be burned in homes and public places to fumigate them. Addressing his cabinet via videolink (thereby avoiding any chance of infection himself) Berdymukhammedov advised that yuzarlik could easily kill pathogens "invisible to the naked eye", with this "sacred plant" having been known to eliminate bacteria and repel insects by his countrymen's wise ancestors for "millennia".

## STRANGE STATESMEN #38



ABOVE: Turkmenistan's President Berdymukhammedov, brandishing some choice herbs to fight off the coronavirus.

Unfortunately, as Covid-19 is not a bacterial pathogen but a virus, and is not spread by insects, this would do little good. Nonetheless, Gurbanguly's word is law, and before long old women were smoking out a UN conference in the capital, Ashgabat, and officials doing likewise to schools, government offices and, just to be on the safe side, cemeteries.

It was also widely reported that the President had banned the use of the very word 'coronavirus' in an effort to deny it even existed, although this wasn't *quite* true. While State media only refer to the pandemic in euphemisms like "the complex situation that has arisen in the modern world", Turkmenistan did act early to block flights from China and developed advice leaflets and hotlines to advise citizens about the pandemic – just without any of them using the word 'coronavirus'. The President didn't have to explicitly ban the phrase; simply by

avoiding using it himself, he gives a signal to others that they should not do so either, lest they incur his displeasure. Reports of secret police arresting those overheard uttering the word in public are probably just examples of over-eager lackeys rather than any official policy *per se*.

However, one official policy Berdymukhammedov really was once responsible for came during a former spell as Health Minister, when he was tasked with closing down all the nation's hospitals outside the capital on the grounds they were unnecessary; if anyone got ill, "they can come to Ashgabat," it was said at the time. <sup>10</sup>

In comparison to all this, the idea of mainlining some Dettol sounds positively sensible.

Next time: President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil tackles coronavirus with the aid of an exalchemist guru who believes science itself to be a giant Communist con-trick.

### **NOTES**

- **1** www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ohiolawmaker-refuses-wear-mask-becuase-hesays-it-dishonours-n1201106
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- 2 https://meduza.io/en/feature/2020/03/30/go-hard-or-go-home; https://dnaindia.com/world/report-everyone-will-eventually-die-chechnya-leader-ramzan-kadyrov-on-coronavirus-panic-2817592
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- 10 Times, 17 Mar 2020; https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-turkmenistan-has-not-banned-coronavirus; https://eurasianet.org/turkmenistan-up-in-smoke; https://business.com/tm/post/5245/harmala-used-against-respiratory-diseases-in-turkmen-traditional-medicine; www.rferl.org/a/Wait\_I\_Thought\_He Was A Dentist/1783927.html

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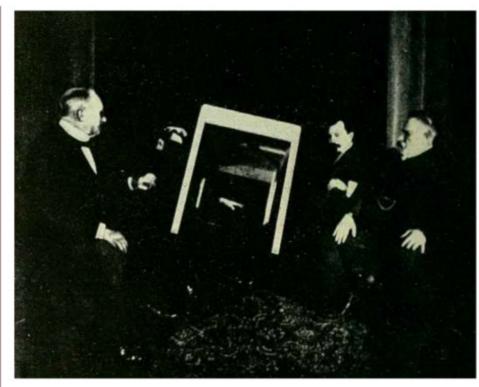
## The "roll-off" factor

RICHARD GEORGE wonders why scepticism quickly replaces belief when we're confronted with strange phenomena

he incidents seemed to roll off our minds..." So Hereward Carrington on investigating the Spiritualist medium Eusapia Palladino and the physical phenomena she reportedly produced. On the day, he, and his two colleagues from the Society for Pyschical Research (SPR), believed: next morning, scepticism reasserted itself.

Here is Charles Richet, addressing the SPR in 1899: "When we return to ourselves... we begin to doubt... I saw, no doubt; but did I see aright?" 1 And here is philosopher CEM Joad in *Harpers* magazine in July 1938: "As so frequently occurs when one is investigating so-called abnormal phenomena, one finds it equally impossible to withhold credence from the facts or to credit any possible explanation of the facts".

I can vouch for this "roll-off" factor myself. About 10 years ago, someone I knew died suddenly. A day or two later, the booster aerial on my boxy old televideo flew to the ground for no apparent reason. I don't recall it being windy, or the window being wide open. I immediately wondered if this was my acquaintance violently asserting that she still existed. Next day I asked myself: "Which is more likely – that, or a gust, or my foot tangling with the flex?" I'm still convinced it wasn't my foot or the wind. But before I began this article, I hadn't thought about it for a long time. It had been, in the words of Alan Murdie: "Dismissed, forgotten or simply labelled as 'Just One of Those Things'..." 2



I first encountered the world of the paranormal in the late 1970s. My father worked at a converted coaching inn in Stevenage called The Grange (formerly The Swan). An ostler, the story went, had murdered a maid and gone to the gallows. The caretaker saw a girl in grey ascend the main staircase and disappear through a wall; a little girl, daughter of a cleaner, saw a dwarfish black figure with a tall hat in an attic; and my father's boss was knocked over by a "rushing shadow". The case is fascinating, and not yet fully investigated.

But what about the "roll-off" factor? Ghost sightings are fixed in a point of space, at a point of time: but what about the witnesses? They have the rest of their lives ahead of them. Do they dismiss, or forget? And memory, as we well know, is unreliable. In any case, all these were single witness reports: could witnesses have confabulated a Grey Lady, or a Black Dwarf, rather than something else, because of what they had heard from others? How many ghosts are selfperpetuating?

In my life so far, I have had two UFO experiences. In July 2003, in my garden in St Albans, I saw a cross between a plane and a plastic bag.3 It moved

like a plane, slowly and evenly; it seemed as far away as a plane; but it was tangled, and transparent. It isn't much of a sighting. The prime suspects are a snarled-up scientific balloon,<sup>4</sup> or an illusion caused by "floaters" in the vitreous humour of the eye, of which I have many.<sup>5</sup> But I have always remembered it. Unlike the other incident.

A few years later – I can't be more precise - I saw small ball-like objects in rectangular formation at sunset, in the direction of Luton Airport. I'd seen something similar on film. Again, it doesn't amount to much: it could have been reflections, or even those pesky Chinese lanterns. But the point is: I'd forgotten. I dredged this up with difficulty. Why do some of these memories float like corks, and others sink like stones?

And there is another category of memories relevant here: memories of dreams. Most of them sink without trace; a few survive into long-term memory, like shells we've beachcombed. Our dreams, as much as the events that "roll off", are our para-autobiographies.

Even if they do not amount, paranormally, to a hill of beans, experiences like these are important. They are damned

LEFT: "Flashlight photograph of the levitation of a table by Palladino" from Carrington's Eusapia Palladino and her Phenomena (1909).

data; damned, in many cases, by ourselves. Even if we can explain them away, relegate them to the mental equivalent of the attic in The Grange, they have been ontological earth tremors, causing us to question our most basic assumptions about the world. They have stimulated our imaginations, and provoked our intellects to find solutions. Intellect and imagination: yin and yang. Inspector Morse and MR James. Indeed, healthy, open-minded scepticism may be more fortean than an uncritical, doctrinaire acceptance of the supernatural. Morse as a psychic investigator? James as a Cambridge detective? Now that would be interesting...

### **NOTES**

1 Guy Lyon Playfair, The Indefinite Boundary, 1976, pp 68, 73, 97, 124. 2 In FT382:20. This is not quite the same as Mary Rose Barrington's "jotts" or "jottles" (see FT392:20-**22** and Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The* Encyclopædia of Ghosts and Spirits, 2000, p201).

3 In 2015 an object resembling a "very large inflated plastic bag" was photographed from a plane in the UK (www.mirror.co.uk/news/weirdnews/chilling-moment-ufo-followsplane-11685063), and in California, back in February 2011, "zappa134" posted footage of a similar object on YouTube (www.youtube.com/ watch?v=nDKGe9q9zMc). In response "Mocrobsky" claimed this sort of thing happened regularly in Argentina! **4** Nigel Watson wrote an article about balloons of various kinds being mistaken for UFOs in Paranormal Magazine 39:50ff, 2009. **5** This was a suggested explanation for a 1967 sighting by JBW Brooks at Moigne Downs, Dorset (Robert Chapman, Unidentified Flying Objects,

RICHARD GEORGE is equally happy discussing forteana, the Classics, or Moby Grape reunion albums.

1969, p31.

## BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

## NO 54. TO BE A PRINCESS, A QUEEN... THEN A MARTIAN?

The curious case of Hélène Smith (1861-1929) used to be notorious in fortean circles, if only for her remarkable claim to have communicated with Martians by way of automatic writing (see FT76:22-28). She even went so far as to reproduce the writing of the Martians and spoke the language. (For another medium who made similar claims of Martian contact, see FT314:28-29.) Her distinction deserves to be revived and preserved, for rather less often celebrated are her remarkable additional claims to have had former lives as a 15th-century Indian princess as well as no less a personage than Marie Antoinette, the doomed wife of Louis XVI of France. Her case – or cases – were followed for five years by Théodore Flournoy, professor of psychology at the University of Geneva, a man of wide accomplishments, and by no means a fool. After initially studying medicine, he gained bachelor's degrees in mathematics, natural sciences, literature, and engineering, and had an abiding interest in philosophy, especially the work of Immanuel Kant. His dad, a wealthy stockbroker, was able to withstand this tendency to become the eternal student; finally back at home in Geneva, Flournoy settled on psychology as a career, and so became acquainted with Mlle Smith – real name Catherine-Elise Müller – wellknown in the city as a medium; she had a high-powered job in commerce, and never charged for her psychic sittings.

The first chapter of Flournoy's *From* India to the Planet Mars (1901) is devoted to a description of the nature of Mlle Smith's mediumship, which was complex and manifold, in that she had visual and auditory hallucinations, wrote automatically, took on the personality of her communicators and spoke in their voices, and induced table rappings. Also seemingly present for much of the time was her 'spirit guide', who called himself Leopold. But he "is only a pseudonym under which is concealed the illustrious Cagliostro, who, it appears, was madly infatuated with Queen Marie Antoinette, and who now, discarnate and floating in space, has constituted himself the guardian angel in some respects of Mlle Smith, in whom after a long search he has again found the august object of his unhappy passion of a century ago." Count Cagliostro (1743–95), it may be recalled, was born Joseph Balsamo (his title seems to have been self-awarded) and in various tours of Europe gained a reputation (and a fortune) as a successful alchemist (for a fake Cagliostro wunderkammer, see FT354:6-7). Not everyone was impressed, however, and finally in Rome in 1789 he was scooped up by the Inquisition. Found guilty of promoting Freemasonry, he died in prison. Flournoy makes no mention of Cagliostro's colourful career and attendant scandals, perhaps feeling his



contemporary audience already knew the lurid background.

Next, Flournoy turns to Mlle Smith's childhood and family background. Flournoy describes Hélène Smith when they met as "a beautiful woman about 30 years of age, tall, vigorous, of a fresh, healthy complexion, with hair and eyes almost black, of an open and intelligent countenance, which at once invoked sympathy. She evinced nothing of the emaciated or tragic aspect which one habitually ascribes to the sibyls of tradition, but wore an air of health, of physical and mental vigour, very pleasant to behold..." Her merchant father, by birth Hungarian, "possessed a remarkable

facility for languages", which Hélène appears not to have inherited except "in a latent and subliminal manner". Her mother indulged in some table-tipping in the mid-1800s, and later had "sporadic visions". One involved an angel appearing above her ill infant daughter (Hélène's sister) in the night; the child died the next day. Hélène's grandmother and brother also had minor paranormal experiences. As a child and adolescent, she had occasional waking hallucinations, and some hypnogogic and hypnopompic visions. She was also an inveterate daydreamer. Flournoy tells us: "All that we know of Hélène's character, both as a child and as a young girl, shows us that her dominant emotional note was a sort of instinctive inward revolt against the modest environment in which it was her lot to be born, a profound feeling of dread and opposition, of inexplicable malaise, of bitter antagonism against the whole of her material and intellectual environment. While showing herself always very devoted to her parents and brothers, she had only feeble natural affinities for them. She felt like a stranger in her family and as one away from home. She had a feeling of isolation, of abandonment, of exile, which created a sort of gulf between her and her family. So strong were these feelings that she actually one day seriously asked her parents if it was absolutely certain that she was their daughter, or whether it was not possible that the nurse might someday by mistake have brought home another child from the daily walk."

Hélène herself said: "Even while very voung I do not remember to have shared any of the tastes or any of the ideas of the members of my family. Thus during the whole of my childhood I was left in what I call a profound isolation of heart. And in spite of all, in spite of this complete want of sympathy, I could not make up my mind to marry, although I had several opportunities. ...since I have engaged in spiritism I have found myself so surrounded with sympathy and friendships that I have somewhat forgotten my sad lot." Which, as Flournoy says, speaks volumes. Her sitters provide her with warm sympathetic companionship; the shadowy and capricious Leopold, who would on occasion irrupt into her waking life, is like an adult version of a child's 'invizikid'

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ABOVE: Hélène Smith's Martian alphabet. OPPOSITE: Mlle Smith with Théodore Flournoy.

(see last column, FT393:52-53); contact with the spirits gives her meaning and purpose. And taken together, these things justified her lifelong sense of distinction, and gave her a place in the world at large.

After a digression on Mlle Smith's character, which he finds exemplary in all respects, and a long disquisition on the Leopold entity, Flournoy turns to the matter of Mars. Among her three great 'cycles' of stories, this actually emerged last, after Marie Antoinette and then the Indian princess. Flournoy seems to have departed from the chronology in order to place the accounts in ascending order of complexity; although fragments from any one cycle would intrude into accounts of the others: "It is possible... to behold, in the same séance... in complete somnambulism, a Hindoo vision... followed by a Martian dream, with an incarnation of Leopold in the middle, and a scene of Marie Antoinette to wind up with." Flournoy is not impressed with Leopold. We are, he says, "forced to ask whether this soidisant authentic revenant is simply a very well-gotten-up simulacrum, an admirable reconstruction, a marvellous imitation, such as the subliminal faculties are only too glad to produce for the diversion of psychologists and the mystification of the simple," and notes that "there are the answers of Leopold to the questions put to him concerning his terrestrial life. These answers are remarkably evasive or vague. Not a name, not a date, not a precise fact does he furnish." Flournoy illustrates a distinct difference between Leopold's handwriting and that of Cagliostro. However, as 'protector' - Freudians might call it a projected superego - "Leopold certainly expresses in his central nucleus a very honourable and attractive side of the character of Mlle Smith, and in taking him as her 'guide' she only follows inspirations which are probably among the best of her nature." Which is a nice way of saying that Leopold/Cagliostro/Balsamo is her own invention, although Mlle Smith would never accept this.

Flournoy seems to have regarded the 'Martian problem' as the easiest to solve because Mlle Smith made the

## "BOOKS WERE SAFER THAN OTHER PEOPLE ANYWAY." Neil Gaiman

mistake (our word) of being so specific about the Martian tongue. He says: "I must acknowledge that as a linguist and philologist I am very much like an ass playing the flute," but he makes a pretty good hoof of analysing the strange tongue and alphabet that Mlle Smith produced and that Leopold so often obliged in translating. He concludes that Mlle Smith's 'Martian' is actually a version of French; the only letters in the Martian alphabet that we recognise as bearing any resemblance to an Earthly one is terrestial 'b', which looks like a distorted version of Hebrew *lamed* ('l'), and the sign for the plural, which could be an inverted version of the (handwritten) Greek 'x'. You may be able to find others (see picture above).

There are subtler objections, which Flournoy pursues with admirable diligence and clarity, but which would take too long to explicate here. Suffice to say his flautistry isn't bad for a donkey, and he proves his point. From the position of finde-siècle astronomy, Mlle Smith might have been better off sticking to the Martian canals and her rather charming paintings of Martian houses and landscapes and some rather curious animals. What's also noteworthy is that the actual messages from the Martians, as reported by Flournoy at least, are utterly uninformative as to daily life, economics, flora and fauna, politics and social organisation, and so on. This is a somewhat egregious omission. The eccentrics of the 1950s contact movement were cannier than she.

There is a related linguistic problem with Mlle Smith's *persona* as Marie

Antoinette: she seems to have forgotten every word of her native German language, which is quite a surprise, although her French spelling is appropriately antique. One of the heftier problems is the stark contrast between the mostly frivolous and extravagant character of the French queen and the demure, even inhibited, nature of Mlle Smith; perhaps this persona was a necessary relief; against that at least one informant, the Queen's brother, said she was rather prudish. And the supposed handwriting of Marie Antoinette as received by Mlle Smith bears little resemblance to the historic character's, as Flournoy amply illustrates. The French plot is slightly thickened by Leopold's claiming that as Cagliostro he was infatuated with Marie Antoinette, and is suitably delighted to see her reincarnated in Mlle Smith. In real life the historical pair seem to have had not much contact; in any case Cagliostro's passion went unrequited, for Marie Antoinette's own one true love was the Swedish diplomat Count Axel Fersen.

The Indian cycle brings up a far thicker plot. According to Mlle Smith's séanceroom testimony, she had been born an Arab sheikh's daughter, named Simandini, in the early 15th century, and was taken to Tchandraguiri to be a wife (ultimately his favourite) of the rajah Sivrouka Nayaka. In 1401 he had built a massive fortress there. There were several major problems with the tale. That an Arabian lady, presumably Muslim, should end up the wife (or concubine) of a Hindu seems unlikely. Flournoy could find but one solitary, second-hand source for Sivrouka's earthly existence, which at least had the saving grace of describing him as a Jain, although the experts Flournoy consulted denounced the source as seriously unreliable. Flournoy's best explanation for all this was that Mlle Smith was reviving some cryptomnesic experience. But there was another kind of catch. In her character as Simandini, Mlle Smith revealed that none other than Flournoy was a reincarnation of the rajah Sivrouka. Flournoy, with delicacy and subtle periphrasis, naturally considers whether this indicated that Mlle Smith had developed what we would call a crush on him, but absolves her of the embarrassment.

So Flournoy – a trifle regretfully, one senses – concludes that Mlle Smith's previous incarnations and Martian adventures are products of her own subliminal imagination. Yet he cannot be dismissed as an intransigent 'debunker', for he asserts his faith in both telepathy and psychokinesis. And his dissection of Mlle Smith's claims are nothing if not exhaustive. A book to remember.

Théodore Flournoy, From India to the Planet Mars: a study in a case of somnambulism with glossolalia, Harper & Brothers, 1901. Republished at great expense by the Princeton University Press, but also available free online.

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## A Promethean enterprise

**Tom Ruffles** examines a new study of the early days of the Society for Psychical Research and its exploration of the complex relationship between science and religion

## The New Prometheans

Faith, Science, and the Supernatural Mind in the Victorian Fin de Siècle

Courtenay Raia

University of Chicago Press 2019

Pb, 424pp, \$35/£27, notes, bib, ind, ISBN 9780226635354

Scientific advances in the second half of the 19th century had implications both for religious belief, requiring a new framework within which a relationship between secular and religious values could be determined, and for the understanding of consciousness.

Courtenay Raia has brought together a wide range of sources

to examine the contributions made by the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) to these currents, highlighting the role psychical research was to play within the renegotiation between science and religion and in the development of psychology.

The formation of the SPR in 1882 was less an attempt by its pioneers to nostalgically fill a void caused by the growth of "reluctant doubt" than an endeavour to become an integral element of science's energetic march towards a fuller understanding of the world, constituting a "Promethean enterprise" that in its early days looked as though it might succeed. The SPR's founders may have grappled with the conflict between not being able to live with religion yet not able to live without it, but their approach was one of scepticism, not faith, as part of a broader movement seeking a harmonisation between epistemology and the search for spiritual meaning.

Raia is not interested in the reality or otherwise of psychic phenomena, but in the role psychical research played in the development of the institutions of academic science. Rather than providing a linear narrative with details of the SPR's programmes, she focuses on the ideas and practices of four individuals who were significant contributors to both the debates the SPR's work generated and the four disciplines they represented: Sir William Crookes (chemistry), Frederic Myers (psychology), Sir Oliver Lodge (physics) and Andrew Lang (anthropology).

All four served as president

of the SPR and collectively indicate the extent to which, despite a level of hostility, the Society was embedded in elite social, cultural and scientific networks, to a degree that may seem surprising today when psychical research is so often dismissed as pseudoscience. Col-

lectively the four helped to make psychical research – located at the intersection of the physical and mental, while acknowledging the lack of strict demarcation – part of the public discourse, bringing to bear a multidisciplinary approach that was ahead of its time.

Thus while the SPR conformed to the scientific method, it expanded the limits of what had previously been that method's objects of study. In particular, it was able to contribute to the growing interest in consciousness, with Myers's subliminal self not in opposition to the nascent discipline of psychology but at its

Psychical research put universal questions to nature on behalf of humanity

cutting edge, particularly alert to the progress being made in France. Raia accords Myers two chapters, compared to one each for the other three individuals she primarily studies, a testament to his significance.as a major thinker.

Admittedly the outcomes were not always successful, as the chapters dealing with Crookes's involvement with medium Florence Cook (sardonically titled "William Crookes in Wonderland: Scientific Spiritualism and the Physics of the Impossible") and Lodge's championing of ether attest. But in general their astonishingly productive empirical explorations, far more sophisticated than previous initiatives such as Edward Cox's Psychological Society, tested the boundaries of the developing scientific disciplines (though not without controversy), evolving both experimental methods and a theoretical perspective that could critically address such phenomena as Spiritualism, Theosophy and mesmerism, often to their adherents' displeasure.

For a brief period, psychical research was highly influential in its approach as it wrestled with aspects of the supernormal mind and surveyed the boundaries of incarnate and discarnate existence. It established itself as a hub for an international network of scholars stimulated by its innovative approach, though not ultimately managing to

attain professional status within academe. The final chapter notes that the early promise of psychical research has not been fulfilled; despite its rigour, and while, today, projects occasionally throw up provocative results, it is still not considered a legitimate undertaking by mainstream science.

Unfortunately Raia's treatment, though erudite, is marred by dense prose which makes for a stiff read. It fails to give due credit to Edmund Gurney's contributions to the SPR's research efforts (which were more significant than Lang's), and completely ignores Trevor Hamilton's dissection of Myers's thought in Immortal Longings (2009), despite Myers's centrality to her analysis. She also agrees with the unreliable hatchet-wielding Trevor Hall that Crookes and Cook had an affair when this is speculation. Like the Templeton Foundation, the modern SPR is, it is claimed, attempting to import religious questions into scientific frameworks, which ignores the latter's "no corporate views" policy and for which no evidence is produced.

Despite these reservations, *The* New Prometheans is a useful contribution to our understanding of the SPR, and anyone with some prior knowledge who wants to know more about early psychical research, and the complexities of the dynamic intellectual context that characterised its heroic period, will be able to appreciate just how groundbreaking its pioneers were. As Raia concludes, "psychical research put universal questions to nature on behalf of humanity", and the ambition is surely worthy of respect, whatever one concludes about the achievements.



## **Performance stories**

Storyteller Olivia Armstrong is entranced by fairy tales from Newfoundland

## Clever Maids, **Fearless Jacks** and a Cat

**Fairy Tales from a Living Oral Tradition** 

Anita Best, Martin Lovelace, Pauline Greenhill

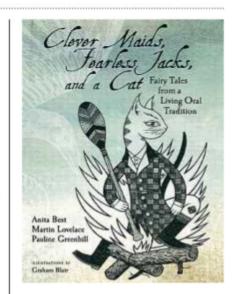
Utah State University Press 2019

Pb, 325pp, \$29.95/£21, illus, bib, notes, ind, ISBN 9781607329190

Clever Maids, Fearless Jacks and a Cat is a collection of 14 transcribed Märchen - tales of wonder and magic from Newfoundland, originally told by two local citizens, Alice Lannon and Philip Pius Power. It is presented as a "modest sequel" to the exhaustive Folktales of Newfoundland (1996).

Within the storytelling community there is a folk belief that the storyteller who told the story last is standing directly behind the current teller, creating an unbroken chain of flowing story. I am a performance storyteller myself, and the majority of my repertoire begins with tales from books, peppered with scattered fragments of remembered family tales; it is rewarding to be presented with stories with a sense of continual authenticity. How much this unbroken line of transmission actually exists we can never truly know, but here we are presented with stories that have been passed down through family or community lines. They were learned by Pius on board schooners, new stories being brought back each fishing season; or remembered and told by Alice in kitchens to soothe fractious children.

The tales have been accurately transcribed, giving us the pauses and asides of the tellers, capturing their idiosyncratic speech patterns, and giving a sense of the cadence and rhythmic quality of spoken word. Concise notes



are an ideal starting point for anyone interested in storytelling, whether as a performer, folklorist or listener. A story can only ever really be told if there is someone to receive it; in the way these tales have been faithfully recorded, we are there with Alice and Pius, being entranced by them.

Within the tales we find the usual stock characters of princesses, giants, witches and heroes, enchanted realms of forests and cobwebbed castles - but we also find redolent details rooting them to a specific time and place. In "Jack Ships to the Cat", when hero Jack is apprenticed to a captain, we learn of the reality of Newfoundland shipping life, albeit through a magical talking cat. The stories and characters often have a toughness and grit about them, charged with an air of salt seaspray and freezing fog.

Stories, although seemingly ephemeral, are living things. Storytellers have a "responsibility to maintain something that is too valuable to be lost". These tales show that, the more a teller tells it, the richer a story becomes, smoothed by the shaping of each word, coated in the patina of retelling, created from a lifetime of memory and experience and protected within the teller as a pearl within the oyster. And these particular story pearls from tellers past are now given to us.

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## **Into the Abyss**

A Neuropsychiatrist's Notes on **Troubled Minds** 

Anthony David

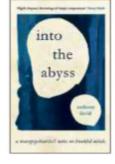
Oneworld 2020

Hb, 216pp, £14.99, notes, ind, ISBN 9781786077059

Into the Abyss: an apt title for exploring the often challenging realm of mental illness and the complexity of dysfunctional brains – or is it minds? Much like the nature versus nurture debate: both can be significant to an individual's mental and physical developmental outcomes. **Neuropsychiatrist Anthony** David's book reads well because the complicated and fascinating subject matter, describing the world of neuropsychiatry through his experiences of it, is presented in a warm and accessible style. The book offers a unique window into the individual worlds of some of his past patients.

Anthony David demonstrates how the biopsychosocial model

can be used in the translation of the origin, presentation and formulation of patient treatment. This is portrayed across a number of respectful, idiographic



case studies of patients he has encountered over his working life. That's not to say that reductionism does not play a role here; it does, and as a medical professional he admits that he believes "everything in our mental life does come down to, can be reduced to, the workings of our brains" as indicated in one patient diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour. However, it has been well established how biology alone is not the only explanatory or contributory factor when our minds and bodies malfunction. As human beings we are subject to a vast number of internal and external influences that shape our mental and physical worlds, and it is clear that the author appreciates this fact, and his varied experiences in the field of his expertise have revealed this interconnectedness time and time again.

I appreciated his genuine interest, concern and compassion for the individuals he has treated, always and most importantly respecting them as human beings in their own right. He is also very honest about his working experiences and how he has formulated his thoughts, diagnoses, treatment options and his carefully considered conclusions regarding the holistic picture of his patients: their life journeys, experiences, beliefs, and aspirations. The book leads the reader through each individual case with literary ease and clarity of explanation, generating understanding and a familiarity, as the reader becomes acquainted with each patient through his gentle, observant, often witty and always engaging narrative.

I sometimes felt I wanted to know even more about the patients he writes about – but that's not necessarily a negative. Significantly, it was pleasing to see how Anthony David sees this deeply personal view into the minds, bodies, and lives of his patients, and their trust in him, as much more than a job, or even a vocation; it is an absolute privilege. Rosie Freedman



## **Not Born Yesterday**

The science of who we trust and what we believe

Hugo Mercier

Princeton University Press 2020

Hb, 364pp, £25, notes, bib, ind, ISBN 9780691178707

Cognitive psychologist Hugo Mercier makes the case against gullibility, arguing that we have a sophisticated battery of mechanisms to show who is likely to be telling the truth. In dramatic contrast to the usual line that we are constantly misled by fake news, advertising and conspiracy theories, Mercier says that we are pretty good at making up our own minds.

He has plenty of material to back this up, drawing from evolutionary biology, signalling and deception in animals and careful re-appraisal of some famous psychology experiments. Mercier's case is, however, built very heavily on a glass-half-full view of gullibility. Because we are not all gullible all the time, this means we are not gullible. For example, on Nazi propaganda, he wheels out evidence that Hitler was not really that popular and that many Germans were never true supporters. While

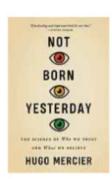


this is certainly accurate, the Nazis' propaganda machine was effective enough to give them an unbreakable grip on Germany with appalling consequences.

Similarly, he contests the idea that the Church was so successful in winning hearts and minds in mediæval Europe, quoting complaints about the people's lack of piety and poor church attendance. But one only has to see a cathedral to realise that, if the population were not convinced, they were compliant... which is arguably all the Church needed.

In political and commercial areas, Mercier provides statistics showing that mass media work mainly on those who are already convinced and that outlets like Fox News do not change public

opinion as a whole. Perhaps so; but they do keep their consumers comfortably isolated from other viewpoints.



Executives at

Coca-Cola might be surprised to learn that their \$5 billion advertising budget to convince people that their carbonated, caffeinated, sweetened water is superior to rival products is basically unnecessary.

While Nigerian 419 email scams may net hundreds of millions a year, Mercier sees the fact that most of them fail as a sign that we are not at all gullible. And the reason that leaders like Trump, Johnson and Putin get elected is not because people actually believe what they say, it's because people support them anyway. A sobering idea.

His contrarian stance means he has to go through some contortions to get everything to fit his thesis. This is a shame: the basic content on how we recognise what is true, and how we can be fooled, is pretty sound, and there is plenty of solid food for thought. With another angle, it would have been a far more convincing and informative read.

However, charging people £20 for a book telling them they are not gullible does look a lot like taking the mickey.

**David Hambling** 



## **Republic of Lies**

**American Conspiracy Theorists** and their Surprising Rise to **Power** 

Anna Merlan

Arrow 2020

Pb, 275pp, £9.99, bib, ind, ISBN 9781787460201

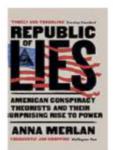
There are few topics getting more attention than conspiracy theories right now. Due largely to Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, academics have had little choice but to document the neverending rash of individual conspiracy theories that have captivated society. A positive consequence of this is that bright minds are beginning to explore the factors that drive conspiracy theories as a class of ideas. Unfortunately, publishers have glutted the market with not so bright minds documenting the supposed rise of conspiracy beliefs; many of these provide little more than touristic observations and unevidenced conclusions detached from the latest scholarship. Anna Merlan's Republic of Lies is different from - and much better than - its competitors in that it fuses solid first-hand journalism with both historical accounts and the everexpanding body of social science literature on the topic.

Merlan opens with her experiences on the Conspirasea cruise, a ship filled with conspiracy theorists, UFO enthusiasts and pseudoscience fanatics. Given that she was trapped on a boat with highly suspicious people, it's little surprise that she was eventually identified as a journalist and accused by her fellow travellers of being a CIA agent. Encounters with conspiracy theorists follow her throughout the book as she talks to Trump supporters, InfoWars reporters and Pizzagate advocates.

Her interviews with a range of conspiracy theorists are entertaining enough on their own. But she goes much further by situating the modern conspiracy theorists she interviews within history; by tracing their specific conspiracy theories back to both their contemporary origins and their broader historical roots (including ancient Rome), she provides a view of conspiracy theorising that is much richer than can be found in other popular accounts.

While much of the journalism addressing conspiracy theories either ignores or misuses the

emerging social science, Merlan situates her interviews within this growing body of scientific literature, in a way that is readable and informative, sometimes using her first-hand observations to challenge what some of the schol-



ars have concluded about conspiracy theorists.

I disagree with where she places most of the blame for contemporary conspiracy theorising; I'm

not convinced that social media, a "rigid class structure" or a "vanishing social safety net" are to blame for the current moment we find ourselves in. It's not that her diagnosis is necessarily wrong, but rather that conspiracy theories are the product of complex social and political factors that sometimes elude even the best attempts at explanation.

Merlan's writing is easy to follow and moves quickly through interviews, historical accounts and her own research. Even though I have been studying the topic myself for more than a decade, I found her work quite fresh and illuminating. Strongly recommended for anyone interested in gaining a deeper understanding of contemporary conspiracy theorising. Joseph E Uscinski



## The Truth about Fat

Anthony Warner

Oneworld Publications 2020

Pb, 366pp, £9.99, ind, ISBN 9781786077264

Fat is a fortean issue. Reality TV has replaced *FT*'s beloved freak shows, yet attitudes towards obesity often remain voyeuristic, patronising and anachronistic. This book makes refreshing, humane and essential reading.

Anthony Warner – a biochemist who became "head development chef of one of the UK's largest food manufacturers" – argues that much critical commentary about obesity comes "almost exclusively from affluent, privileged commenters". Some have a political axe to grind or books, diets or supplements to promote. Forteans should bring their traditional scepticism to bear on experts making simplistic pronouncements about obesity and diet generally.

The Truth About Fat offers a nuanced, well-informed, eloquent discussion of the biology underlying obesity. Fat isn't inert blubber: it pumps out cocktails of hormones and other chemicals that control metabolism and food-seeking behaviour. This forms part of a complex and complicated network, which is partly genetically determined.

Nevertheless, nurture as well as nature contributes. Obesity is most common in areas of socioeconomic deprivation. Numerous mutually reinforcing factors make obtaining healthy balanced diet much more difficult for people enduring deprivation. As Warner notes, it's easy to underestimate the way in which the stresses of poverty undermine choice, whether about drugs, violence or food.

So, what can we do? Stop explicit and implicit fat shaming for a start. Stop blaming the obese for their condition. Obesity is far more complex than a "simple" lack of will power, and weight loss isn't easy.



The challenge, Warner notes, is to help obese people, especially those suffering health problems, adopt "better behaviours in a realistic and

sustainable way". Tailored interventions should reflect each person's needs, preferences, resources and lifestyle. Some need psychological support. A few need surgery. Exercise should be made easier and less intimidating if you don't have a fitness magazine physique. Others would benefit from better social conditions. Essentially, reducing inequality should reduce our waistlines.

Whether or not you agree with all Warner's comments, everyone who wants to understand obesity or is worried about their weight should read this intelligent, insightful and humane book. Stories about "super obese" people will, no doubt, continue to grace the pages of FT, challenging our views of normality. Warner's book reminds us that, for all their allure, the obese are people, not objects, who need sympathy and support rather than criticism and shaming.

**Mark Greener** 



## A flawed UFO classic

A new edition of Hynek's famous report on Project Blue Book is an interesting historical artefact, says Eric Hoffmann

## The Hynek **UFO Report**

The Authoritative Account of the **Project Blue Book Cover-Up** 

J Allen Hynek

Red Wheel 2020

Pb, 308pp, \$19.95, illus, appx, bib, ISBN

J Allen Hynek, a Dayton, Ohio, based astronomer, was in 1947 enlisted by the Air **Technical Intelligence Center** at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base to provide a professional, scientific review of some of the very first official UFO reports.

He went on to take part in the United States Air Force's various study projects and panels. Project Blue Book, the final, longest and best-known of these projects, lasted nearly two decades (1952-1969).

The project, headed by a small staff of low-level military officers, apportioned a minuscule budget and dependent on a non-existent filing system, rarely conducted any in-depth investigations of UFO reports, largely due to a constant lack of manpower and resources [see FT392:57].

Hynek readily acknowledged his frustrations with the Project's limitations, which were more than just budgetary.

According to Hynek, the Project's unofficial mandate, as with its predecessors, was to disprove the existence of UFOs; to quote Hynek, "if it can't be real, it doesn't exist".

With Blue Book, the Air Force, which had long before the Project's inception already concluded that UFOs did not present a threat to national security - their foremost concern from the start – essentially ran a public relations clearing house, the mission of which was to explain away UFO sightings with an over-reliance on mundane explanations.

Indeed, project directors encouraged, if not required, investigators to provide conventional explanations for witnesses' anomalous experiences, such as clouds, birds, weather balloons, atmospheric phenomena or the planet Venus.

Initially a sceptic, Hynek at first relished debunking UFO reports, and his responses helped to set the parameters of Air Force investigations for the next several decades.

Yet as reports began to proliferate in number and intricacy, it became increasingly apparent to Hynek that the Air Force was too quick to dismiss evidence and too ready to propose solutions to various sightings without a careful weighing of the evidence.

As a result, Hynek's scepticism wavered, and he gradually came to view UFOs as a complex phenomenon deserving of scientific analysis.



Unlike Hynek's previous work, the classic The UFO Experience: A Scientific Report (1972), in which he provides a compre-

hensive scientific overview of the phenomenon and introduces the now-famous classification system of close encounters of the first, second and third kind, his second effort, The Hynek UFO Report (1977), is a rather more didactic work.

Indeed, several chapters in the Report are given over to a case-by-case examination of several hundred of the over 12,000 sightings (roughly 144,000 document pages) in the Blue Book files, some of them classic cases (Socorro, Kelly-Hopkinsville, Exeter, the Father Gill sighting), including strange lights, flying discs, radar contacts and close encounters of various kinds.

It is these analyses that, some 43 years later, are perhaps of greatest interest to today's .....

readers.

Hynek's preliminary historical analysis and critique of the US Government's investigations, while necessary to frame his subsequent analysis, is a jargonfree if somewhat dry summary of the official investigations conducted up to that point.

Furthermore, there are significant limitations to the scope of Hynek's work: as a scientist he deals primarily with solid, "objective" physical and perceptual evidence, largely taken at face value, and he fails to delve into deeper metaphysical or psychological considerations.

The Hynek UFO Report was first published in 1977 to coincide with the release of Steven Spielberg's Hynek-inspired blockbuster film Close Encounters of the Third Kind, and is now back in print to accompany the recent television programme Project Blue Book, in which a fictional Hynek is protagonist. (A Hynek-inspired character also appears in the Spielberg film.)

Hynek "didn't come to the UFO field looking for answers to something he already believed", Hynek's children explain in a brief yet insightful foreword new to this edition. "He didn't 'believe' in UFOs, he accepted the validity of a growing number of UFO reports."

This new edition reproduces Hynek's helpful charts, graphs and illustrations, yet regrettably omits the photo reproductions of the original; it also does not correct the original's omission of an index.

Given its vintage, Hynek's report is perhaps best enjoyed as an historical artefact. It provides an opportunity to relive a moment in ufological history, as well as a stark reminder of the inherent limitations of bureaucratic, linear and rational responses to a bafflingly elusive phenomenon that almost by design resists simple explanation.



## Swanson

The Life and Times of a Victorian **Detective** 

Adam Wood

Mango Books 2020

Pb, 741pp, £23.81, illus, notes, ind, ISBN

Superintendent Donald Swanson (1848-1924) was an obscure Victorian police detective, who enjoyed a long and worthy career at Scotland Yard until his retirement in 1903.

Swanson's major claim to fame is the "Swanson Marginalia": some annotations he made to a book of memoirs by his contemporary Sir Robert Anderson, claiming that Jack the Ripper had been identified by a Jewish witness at an unnamed "seaside home", and incarcerated at Colney Hatch asylum, where he died shortly after. Swanson



named his Ripper suspect as "Kosminski". When the leading Ripper expert Paul Begg published the Swanson Marginalia in the 1980s, there was

immediate enthusiasm among the Ripperologist community, and speculation that the mysterious "Kosminski", for whom the careless Swanson had not provided a Christian name, was identical to the bona fide Ripper suspect Aaron Kosminski. The problem is that this mentally ill Polish Jew actually lived on until 1919, as an inmate in Leavesden Asylum. Had Swanson made a mistake, or was there another "Kosminski" in Colney Hatch? Ripperologists have kept on debating this mystery for many years, without much worthwhile being concluded, in this book or elsewhere.

Wood obsessively lists obscure primary sources on Swanson's old cases but unaccountably omits newer and more valuable secondary accounts, some of which would have been only a mouse click away. As he traces Swanson's every movement throughout his long career, he swiftly loses his readers' attention. This is an over-long, bloated monstrosity of a book, badly written and poorly edited, which a competent publisher would have reduced to 200 pages or so. Jan Bondeson





## **SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY**

DAVID BARRETT ROUNDS UP THE LATEST TITLES FROM THE WORLD OF SPECULATIVE AND FANTASTIC FICTION

### **Body Tourists**

Jane Rogers

Sceptre, 2019

Hb, 229pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781529392951

For those of us who grew up on a diet of what Brian Aldiss disparagingly called "cosy catastrophe novels" - John Wyndham, John Christopher and others – the events of the last few months have had an added layer of disquiet. And remember Terry Nation's original 1970s Survivors? (The more recent version with Julie Graham, Paterson Joseph and Zoë Tapper was pretty powerful as well).

We've been half-expecting the death toll to spiral out of control and food chains to supermarkets to break down, and for armed gangs to start roaming the streets. So far, at least, it's not happened. No cosy catastrophes this time; though it's interesting that a lot of mainstream novelists now seem to be venturing into areas normally claimed by SF – or maybe it's just that we're now living in the science-fictional future.

Jane Rogers's *Body Tourists* imagines a dystopic near-future Britain where most people live in massive, cheerless housing estates. For the privileged minority, it's possible to make a digital copy of someone's full memory, allowing their knowledge to remain available after their deaths. Now a young doctor has found a way of transferring these stored memories the entire personality of a nowdead person – into the bodies of young people, for a couple of weeks and for a substantial fee. The novel is told from several viewpoints, including that of the unscrupulous doctor, several of the young people who rent out their bodies to help them out of poverty, and some of those brought back from the dead into fit, healthy young bodies. What could possibly go wrong?

## **Rockstar Ending**

NA Rossi

Resista Pres,s 2020

Pb, 364pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781913417024

Unintended consequences also

lie at the heart of NA Rossi's Rockstar Ending. Britain's youth have had enough of subsidising the elderly, who have pensions and property. Euthanasia is now legal, and if the old would just die, their homes and wealth would become available for others. One by one, benefits for the old are whittled away: insurance after 70, health care after 85. Through carefully targeted advertising on TV and social media (even down to the music on playlists) the elderly are persuaded to do the right thing. Multiple viewpoints work well here, as well in several interlinked storylines: old people about to take the Rockstar Ending to their lives; their families; grassroots campaigners against the process - and a couple of young people working for the ad agency promoting it. A disturbing story, but this first novel would have benefited from professional editing and proofing.

## The Rearranged Life of **Oona Lockhart**

Margarita Montimore

Gollancz, 2020

Hb, 336pp £14.99, ISBN 9781473227606

The Rearranged Life of Oona Lockhart is a polished first novel with a clever and original premise. It's New Year's Eve in 1982, and the eve of Oona's 19th birthday. She's at a party with her boyfriend and other friends, and the band that they're in. The clock strikes midnight and she finds herself in 2015, physically aged 51, but still 19 inside. She has a big house and a personal assistant and she's very, very wealthy, as a result of investments and sporting bets based on prior knowledge.

Every year, on the stroke of the New Year, she wakes up to a different era in her life. After 2015, she's in 1991; after 1991, 2004. Each shift is as confusing as hell as she goes backwards and forwards in her life story; and these transitions don't get any easier, even though she writes a letter at the end of each year to bring herself up to date.

There are some very neat plot twists, and author Margarita Montimore is particularly good on the musical and cultural differences from year to year.

## **Paris Adrift**

EJ Swift

Solaris, 2020

Pb, 436pp, £8.99, ISBN 9781781087848

EJ Swift's Paris Adrift is also about travelling around in time, but in a very different way. In a 2318 wracked by nuclear war, a group of time manipulators work out which points in the past need to be changed to save the world from annihilation. One of them goes back to the early 21st century and guides Hallie, an English girl in Paris, into taking a job at Millie's bar in Clichy, next to the Moulin Rouge. There is a time anomaly in the basement keg room, and Hallie is attuned to it. Not really knowing what she's doing (and certainly not why, until much later in the book) she spends time living in 1875, causing Notre Dame not to be built, and in 1942, where she helps a Jewish cello student to flee occupied Paris. By her acts the future has been saved – but at what other cost? Paris Adrift is a very enjoyable read, but it has some structural problems, with large portions of the story not advancing the plot at all.

## **Elemetal Tales**

Garry Kilworth

PS Publishing, 2019

Hb, 196pp, £20, ISBN 9781786364531

Garry Kilworth has been a prolific and consistently excellent science fiction writer for decades. Elemetal Tales (and no, it's not a misprint) is a collection of 18 stories, each connected in some way to one of the metal elements. Some are historical or mythological: "The Mask-maker" is about a craftsman who has breathed in so much gold dust over the decades that he is now a target for thieves; in "The Emperor" a tyrant wants to be made immortal within a silver statue. Some are future science fiction, like

the story of a robot designed to work on low-gravity planetoids, with a heavy lead coat. There's an intriguing numismatic time travel story about a nickel coin, and a scary one about a kiteflying festival in India, where an assassin uses titanium wire for the kite string. A superb collection.

## The Last Refuge of the **Knights Templar: The Ultimate Secret of the Pike Letters**

William F Mann

Destiny Books, 2020

Pb, 268pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781620559918

Finally, a novel about Freemasons, the Knights Templar and Albert Pike – what's not to like? In short: everything.

The original Knights Templar discovered the treasures hidden by Jewish priests in AD 70; they were "secreted away in France" and then taken to various places around the world, including North America, "where the Templar/Grail families, direct descendants of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, strategically intermarried with the Native North Americans". Letters by 19thcentury Freemason Albert Pike (recently discovered in reality by author William Mann, who is the supreme grand master of the Knights Templar of Canada) contain clues to where the Templar treasure is hidden - "a secret of world proportions," he writes in his preface.

The storytelling is repetitive and the dialogue is awful; characters speak in lectures. The novel is also a love story between two young researchers into the Templars, with possibly the most cringeworthy love and sex scenes ever written, while the 95-year-old grandfather of one of them takes "white powdered gold" as a rich man's Viagra. They're being hunted by a sexually perverted Jesuit priest assassin, the Jesuits being "the Pope's personal storm troopers, who will stop at nothing to regain world dominance". Let's just say that compared to this novel, Dan Brown's The Da Vinci Code looks like great literature.

## **REVIEWS / FILMS**

SEND REVIEW DISCS TO: FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 OQD, UK.

## Slow sci-fi, magic swords

This month's home entertainment offers artfully shot, slow-paced, retrofuturism based on a cult Scandi art book and a high definition release for one of the seminal classics of Hong Kong cinema



## **Tales from the Loop**

Created by Nathaniel Halpern, US 2020 Streaming on Amazon Prime

*Tales from the Loop* is a perfect example of slow sci-fi. You might already be familiar with the inspiration for the series. Simon Stålenhag is a Swedish artist whose work has received a lot of attention over the past few years. Capturing a child's view of the 1980s, infused with abandoned robots, anti-grav ships and strange government installations, his artwork is beautiful, contemplative and haunting: there have been art books, a role-playing game, and now a TV series. Is it possible to capture the beauty of Stålenhag's art and translate it into an eight-episode series? The short answer is yes.

Written by Nathaniel Halpern and Stålenhag, the series is transplanted from the latter's native Sweden to the US. It follows the experiences of residents of the town of Mercer, Ohio, situated above the loop, a machine built to unlock the mysteries of the Universe. While the switch across the Atlantic caused some concern among fans, the tone is perfectly preserved.

Over eight hour-long episodes

## Characters are shattered by the unintended consequences

Tales from the Loop tells eight stories centred on encounters with the technology that litters the landscape. There are body swaps, time-slips and AI, but at its heart the series is about people, and how these experiences change them.

ATV show based on a series of static, albeit evocative, paintings would be easy to get wrong, but not here. The cinematography is stunning, and the succession of beautiful, images will make your heart soar. Each episode has a different director - including Jodie Foster, So Yung Kim and Andrew Stanton - but the series emerges as a coherent whole in which main characters from one episode become background characters in others, and events in one story have consequences further down the line.

This is not *Stranger Things*, probably the most obvious comparison because of the Eighties setting and focus on childhood stories. *Tales from the* 

Loop has a much slower pace, having more in common with Ray Bradbury, Arrival, and Roadside Picnic. The soundtrack reflects this, offering an amazing series of compositions by Philip Glass and Paul Leonard Morgan. Whether it's the sparse piano of 'Walk to School' or the thrumming strings of 'The Fight', the music perfectly captures the tone of the series.

As I said, Tales from the Loop is all about the people, and while the series doesn't have the demonic monsters or alien invaders of other sci-fi shows, the threats are just as menacing: cruelty and thoughtlessness have long-lasting consequences, and people make choices that have devastating results. Characters are shattered by the unintended outcomes of their interactions with the abandoned technology waiting to be discovered in the woods and fields of Mercer. These are incredibly human stories that integrate the technological without pivoting away from the emotional. If you're anything like me, you will find the room getting very dusty during episodes such as 'The Echo-Sphere', 'Transpose', or 'Home'. There are no easy answers here, but there is humanity. Tales from the Loop will break your heart several times over, while showing the silence of loss and the grief and beauty of change that cannot be reversed. **Steve Toase** 

\*\*\*\*

## Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain

Dir Tsui Hark, Hong Kong 1983 Eureka Entertainment, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

This is one of those movies that seemed to come out of nowhere, leaving us awed with delight by an amazing glimpse of a rich Chinese fantasy word. In his commentary on *Zu: Warriors*, the American film historian James Oliver called it "prophetic".

Originally released in Chinese cinemas in 1983, it certainly seemed to herald some important developments. It fed into what was called the Hong Kong 'New Wave' of the 1980s, which spawned a whole generation of Chinese and Taiwanese auteurs, and it was Tsui Hark, to some extent, who led the charge, with a series of films that seemed to dramatise his personal frustration with the old colonial censorship while confronting new but conflicting political loyalties.

The film grips from the start, when deserters from two opposing armies flee into mistshrouded hills to escape the relentless strife of this world. Our hero takes refuge in a haunted cave on Mount Zu and is attacked by vampiric spirits. He is rescued by a Daoist master and his flying swords, and they clash with a firehurling Buddhist monk in pursuit of a terrifying Blood Demon. When the monk is possessed by the demon, they seek refuge in a mysterious enclave of female sorcerers headed by the Ice Fairy. Despite her anger at the intrusion into her magical solitude, the ethereal Ice Fairy attempts an exorcism, but becomes possessed herself. The Daoist master fails to cure her and we learn that the Demon can only be overcome by the 'Twin Swords'. Our hero and the monk's disciple set off to find them, meeting an immortal with prehensile eyebrows called White Brows. Together they convince the female immortal who guards the mystical swords to part with them... and, as the swords are united, the Demon is vanguished.

Before the story launches into this frenetic tale of magic and supernatural beings, it begins with an epic battle between first two (then several other) armies. The reason our hero deserts is that he is spiritually tired of being trapped in this world of endless misery. The point is underlined when the attentive viewer notices



that the fighters of all the armies are dressed almost identically, the factions distinguished only by a brightly coloured scarf. The men escape because they work together. The Buddhist monk and the Daoist master overcome their traditional opposition to jointly tackle the Blood Demon. And in the finale, to avoid their looming fate, the two magic swords and their owners are necessarily merged into a single weapon. This is a powerful subtext for the ordinary Chinese at any level of their uneasy history ... and, ironically, it works as well for uniting the Communists as it does the downtrodden against the warlords and other oppressors.

The cultural influence of Tsui Hark's genre-spanning films cannot be overestimated: many of them inspired such popular series as Once Upon a Time in China, Chinese Ghost Story, Swordsman, and Detective Dee (to name a few); also, many of his disciples and actors went on to distinguished careers of their own.

It is said that Tsui Hark began work on Zu: Warriors having been inspired by Star Wars; but he told interviewers later that he was simply aiming for the same level of success. Yet his mark on Hollywood has been more artistic than financial; he was cited by John Carpenter as an influence on his Big Trouble in Little China (1986).

Much discussion of the film praises Tsui Hark for combining Hong Kong's long tradition of action cinema (wuxia) with special effects provided by a team of Western technicians (some from George Lucas's ILM). Tsui Hark had a reputation for experimenting with new cinematic technology. He once told an interviewer that he had to recruit and train his own technical team, and that while he used CGI technicians from Hollywood to train them, it was his team that did the actual work. The results were not always successful, Hark later confessed, as his students got colours wrong or failed to remove the wires used by 'flying' actors. This edition of the film actually preserves such production mistakes. It was good to view it again, knowing that its 'prophetic' subtext still shines through the occasional clumsiness. **Bob Rickard** 

\*\*\*

## THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

## The Man With the X-Ray Eyes

Dir Roger Corman, US 1963

Second Sight Films, £23.99 (Ltd edition Blu-ray)

## Salem's Lot

Dir Tobe Hooper, US 1979 Warner Bros, £7.99 (Blu-ray)

## **Blood Tide**

Dir Richard Jefferies, UK/Greece 1982

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

## **Dream Demon**

Dir Harley Cokeliss, UK 1987

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

## After Midnight

Dir Jeremy Gardner, US 2019

Arrow Video, £16.99 (Blu-ray)

We're spanning the decades this month with a fistful of horror re-releases. We start in 1963 where Ray Milland is Dr Xavier...The Man with the X-Ray Eyes. His life's work is to extend the range of human vision. He succeeds, and soon he's peeking straight through paper folders and eyeing up the obligatory clothed (yet naked) women, dancing at the type of 'suits and swing music' party only this decade could produce. Things get rather less groovy however when he starts seeing into the very centre of the known Universe... and beyond. Anyone who dismisses Roger Corman as a hack, should hush up and watch this. The so-called B-movie King produces and directs a profound film of genuine depth, intelligence and entertainment value.

Next, we skip to 1979, with the re-release of *Salem's Lot*. Brace yourself for hyperbole, but I reckon this David Soul-led mini-series isn't just the greatest Stephen King TV adaptation ever made



It isn't just the greatest King TV adaptation, it's also got the scariest vampires in horror

(director Tobe Hooper captures the spirit of King perfectly), it's also got the scariest vampires in horror. Yes, I said it. I watched this again last night with my lounge windows wide open. Scared me all over again. It looks wonderfully crisp on Blu-Ray too.



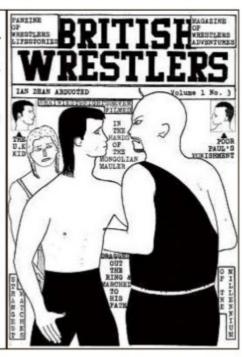
Fast forward to 1982 for Blood Tide. Here, a laid-back James Earl Jones hunts for treasure on a Greek Island, but instead wakes a legendary sea creature from centuries of sleep. To be honest, I felt like I needed waking from centuries of sleep after this. Sure, the locations are lovely, but I can barely remember what happened in this tedious film. That's not a good sign, really.

Next up is *Dream Demon* from 1987, where bride-to-be Jemma Redgrave is plagued by surreal nightmares: giant beetles, public underwear moments, maggoty china dolls... you know the drill. Is she just stressed about marrying a caddish Falklands war hero? Or is there something more spectral at work? Two tabloid journalists feature heavily and are played by... wait for it... Timothy Spall and Jimmy Nail. To think that when looking for Britain's answer to Freddy Krueger the producers saw Auf Wiedersehen Pet on ITV and shouted "Stop the clock... we have our monsters!" Brilliantly inspired or dangerously insane? You choose. It starts well enough, with Redgrave slapping her fiancé's head clean off in the opening sequence. Yet this spurting start is something of a tease really. The rest of the film plods, but amuses too; as when Nail and Spall pull on their latex appliances and start calling Redgrave 'dog meat'.

Finally, we whizz to present day, for 2019's After Midnight. Here a man mopes around his farmhouse after his girlfriend ups and leaves. Why did she go? Will she return? And what the hell is that bizarre cryptid lurking in the woods near the house? Reviews of this indie 'romance horror' include phrases like 'dreadfully boring', 'useless' or 'terribad'. True, the film is pretentious at times, and it's so slow you'll feel your clothes going out of fashion. Yet there's still an earnest attempt at depth here, which I kinda liked.

British wrestling always had a dark side. This magazine explores it. Send SAE for details.

British Wrestlers, City House, 131 Friargate, Preston, Lancs. PR1 2EF.







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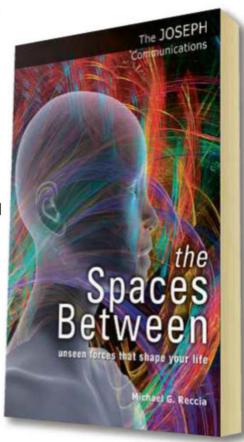
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## **Extraterrestrial** diseases

Can I point out the obvious scientific difficulty with any theory about extraterrestrial diseases affecting human beings [FT392:33]? Diseases on this planet have evolved to affect creatures with terrestrial DNA. Presumably, diseases on other worlds have the same relationship with their hosts and could not affect beings with a different biological basis. (It is possible, but improbable, that Earth's DNA is the only possible basis for life and so is replicated throughout the Universe - but what about silicon-based lifeforms?) Therefore it seems that we couldn't catch the extraterrestrial equivalent of a cold, never mind a coronavirus.

Incidentally, HG Wells, knowing nothing about DNA, got everything wrong in *The War of the Worlds*. His Martians feed on human blood but succumb to Earthly diseases. In fact, they would have been immune to our germs, but would have derived no nutrition from our DNA-incompatible blood. They would actually have starved to death.

• I think it is stretching things a little to say that Ambrose Bierce "mysteriously disappeared" [FT392:34]. A 71-year-old American heads off alone into a Mexico in the throes of revolution/civil war and is never heard of again. Unexplained, perhaps; but in the circumstances, hardly mysterious – in fact, fairly predictable.

Martin Jenkins

London

## **Cosmic clap**

The alleged ufogenic lurgi
Jenny Randles doesn't mention
[FT392:33] is John Keel's 'cosmic
clap': "Male UFO witnesses sometimes develop a temporary set of
symptoms resembling gonorrhoea" (*The Mothman Prophecies*,
1975, footnote p.233). The key
to this extraordinary assertion
may lie earlier in the same book:
"Whatever they are, UFOs radiate
intense actinic rays" (p.16). Exposure to actinic rays, as in pelvic radiotherapy, can cause cystitis. It is

# Alex Chester and his father saw this cloud bird in north Lincolnshire in mid-April 2020.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and

figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal ad-

dress) to Fortean Times, PO Box 66598, London N11 9EN or to

odd, though, that Keel describes a male-only malady.

sieveking@forteantimes.com.

**Richard George** 

St Albans, Hertfordshire

## **Magic onions**

When I was writing my feature on allotment folklore [FT392:52-55], I unearthed absolute reams of tips, and tales from times gone by, on the medical and spiritual benefits of various common vegetables. Most of these didn't make it through to the final article, because I wanted to concentrate on beliefs still in current use – things I'd actually heard from real people in recent years, not legends from old books. One story that didn't make the final cut is the notion that onions absorb disease, so you can use one to draw an illness out of a person or hang one in your home to suck any pestilence out of the air. The earliest written source I've seen for this is Nicholas Culpepper's *Herbal*, although lots of books on folklore say the

idea goes back much earlier and was used as protection against the Black Death.

Surely no one believes such things today? Or so I thought. In these strange and interesting times, it seems onions are having their moment again. According to *Metro* and some other newspapers, using onions to absorb Covid-19 is one of the virus-beating tips circulating on WhatsApp. Just place one in the corner of each room, replace it with a fresh one when it goes black – and it's job done. It seems there's no idea so strange that it can't find a following.

Lisa Gledhill

Goring, Oxfordshire

## **Toriverse**

James Wright says: "It is said that Tori's song 'Past the Mission' was recorded in Sharon Tate's house" [FT388:70]. It's not quite that simple. Tori Amos was great friends with Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails, who sang backing vocals on that track. At the time he owned the house where the Tate murder happened, and he had a recording studio there: "Tori: When I was writing the song, the song said, 'I think Trent Reznor would be really good to sing on me.' So I made it happen, and I met him. I flew into Los Angeles and I went up to the Sharon Tate house where he was staying. It's a very spooky house, not in the way it looks but just because you know what it is." (www.yessaid.com/ int/1994-Spring\_WHFS\_Press.

The quote about Charles Manson from "Tear In Your Hand" could also be about Reznor. She mentions Neil Gaiman in many songs, including: "Horses" and "Carbon". Tori's meanings are very hard to unpick. "Past The Mission" sounds to me like it's about Kurt Cobain. And she and Reznor fell out over the song "Professional Widow", which sounds like it's about his friend Courtney Love, though Tori says not. Anyway, there are no simple answers in the Toriverse.

Pamela Mason

Norwich, Norfolk

## It happened to you

I am a professional artist working mainly with photography and video. I have a longstanding interest in all aspects of the paranormal, and am planning a film project incorporating first-hand accounts of people's supernatural experiences. I would like to interview anyone who has had a paranormal experience, especially those who have seen the ghost of a deceased person, but I am also interested in other supernatural phenomena.

My intention would be to film interviews face-to-face, but if that is not possible, by Skype or phone. Whether recorded interviews are featured as part of the film or not will depend on interviewees' wishes, in addition to the editing process. Strict anonymity if requested. Please contact me by the email address below.

## **Emilia Ukkonen**

emilia.ukkonen.projects@gmail.com

## **LETTERS**





## **Crop guardian?**

I found this mystical-looking old stick man on the road leading to my house on the Isle of Kerrera, Argyll. I'm not sure if he's benevolent, so I'm trying him out in my poly tunnel to see if he blesses my crops before I let him in the house. I've named him 'Bodach' - 'old man' in Scots Gaelic. Rowan Glen, Isle of Kerrera, Argyll

## Glitches in the simulation

I've often wondered about the possibility that the Universe is a simulation since I first came across the idea in FT some years ago. Recent contributors to your letters page have discussed the glitches and breakdowns that we might expect from a longrunning simulation on that scale. In particular, Martin Jenkins [FT384:73] cites the absence of such glitches as evidence that we are not in a simulation. I'd like to take comfort from that, but  $% \left( \frac{1}{2}\right) =\left( \frac{1}{2}\right) \left( \frac{1}{$ unfortunately I can't, because there's no need for the simulation to run smoothly for very long at all. It could have started a millisecond ago with the past and all our memories pre-loaded, and we'd be unable to tell the difference. It could glitch, crash, or lose power as often as it likes, and we wouldn't know it had even missed a beat when it starts up again. Interesting though all this is,

tion, as my brain was telling me as Shaun the Sheep. Coincidentally, Shaun has recently been featured in a film, very popular in cinemas at the end of 2019.

I'm ultimately in agreement with the late Nils Erik Grande, when he concluded [FT382:73] that such musings are "not getting us anywhere". Maybe we can't truly know if our lives are 'real' (whatever that might actually mean), but let's live them as if they are! **Rob Bray** 

Old Stratford, Northamptonshire

## **Shaun the Sheep**

Looking at Jenny Randles's new version of the Kanizsa Illusion [FT391:31], I have to agree that the brain fills in details that are lacking. However, I only saw the 'saucer' after reading the capthat this was a picture of that lovable star of TV and screen known documenting his close encounters with an alien. I am surprised that there has been no review

of Farmageddon in FT as it does seem to be very fortean. **Philip Eley** 

Gosport, Hampshire

## **Inquisitors' trick**

The refusal of some religious groups to give oaths [FT391:23] has also been put to rather more sinister use. Both the Waldensians and the Lollards rejected oaths, the Waldensians as part of their rejection of Catholic doctrinal supremacy and the Lollards because oaths have no basis in Scripture. Papal inquisitors made good use of this as part of their interrogations, making a suspect take an oath regarding their orthodox faith: a Catch 22 if ever there was one.

**Tom Hodgson-Jones** 

Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire

## **Interloper?**

I don't know if lockdown is getting to me, but is there an Imperial Stormtrooper peeping over Dagmar Turner's couch in the article "Fiddling with her brain" [**FT392:12**; yes, there is –Ed]? It brings to mind an adventure my fiancée Catherine and her mother Gill had when viewing a property, because they had spotted a fullsize Dalek in the living room on the property advertisement.

**Martyn Wright** 

Hartlepool, Co. Durham

## House on the **Borderland**

Re the feature about William Hodgson's book *House on the Bor*derland and how landscape can inspire stories and their setting [FT385:38-43]: I was very interested to find out Hodgson had stayed in the village of Ardrahan, Co. Galway. For those interested in the faery faith, Ard rath translates as High Fort – high not in elevation, but in magic. Once many years ago I visited the fort looking for a fogou. It was a clear blue sky December day with a blanket of heavy snow everywhere. Eventually underneath a hawthorn tree I found a lintelled opening with wisps of mist curling from the exit. With lit candle I entered a long curved chamber and meditated. As I was exiting into the bright light, a strong smell of roses enchanted me. In the book, Hodgson describes visiting the "pit" or abyss, which triggered a memory from my childhood.

My father, an antiquarian, took my brother and me to the "devil's punchbowl", a place hidden in the woods where a river disappears underground through a big sinkhole. We were only five or six at the time and my father spent most of the time warning us not to go too near the edge. There are many sinkhole-disappearing rivers in those limestone counties in the west of Ireland, but my instinct tells me this is the dramatic pit that inspired Hodgson's book. The "wasteland" he talks about could be the region called the Burren in Co. Clare, a place of which Cromwell, on his "liberating" march through Ireland, once said: "No tree to hang a man... water to drown him or earth to bury him." The rectory is still standing



outside the village, but I am not sure if the apple trees are still in the garden.

**Michael Walsh** 

Ballintogher, Co.Sligo

## **Moist maps**

Regarding David Gamon's damp road atlas in an otherwise dry car [FT392:75]: I think the answer lies in the water bottle. This cools overnight and, initially, remains cooler than its surroundings as the car warms up. This condenses moisture from the air (from the driver's breath for example) onto its surface. The accumulated water evaporates as temperatures change. A paper atlas could readily absorb this moisture and accumulate it over time, particularly if the book has varnished or laminated covers that would act to some extent as a seal.

I had a similar situation with my trusty Chrysler Cruiser, which became slightly less than watertight following a close encounter with an item of scaffolding, shed from a lorry on the M60 motorway. Three feet to the right and (to paraphrase a police officer at the time) I wouldn't be typing this.

I've no explanation for the Brazilian music cassette, but I expect there's a tasteless pun relating to close shaves.

**Andy Pearson** 

*Warrington, Cheshire* 

## **Zodiacal ring**

I thank Martin Shough and Wim van Utrecht for their balanced and considered response [FT393:70-71]. I was not aware of observers' reports that STEVE appeared grey or white to the naked eye, but know from personal experience that the actual aurora borealis can simultaneously appear white to the eye and green on a digital camera.

As for the presumed circularity of the zodiacal band, I was guided by the wording both of the Brunswick reports cited by the authors and the studies I named in my reply. The former described the phenomenon as "The ring", "a mysterious band of white light crossing the skies from east to west in a *complete* 

grand circle" (my emphasis) and "this luminous girdle". At the other side of the equation, Fessenkoff asserted that the zodiacal light "forme un anneau complet" (again my emphasis). It is clear that Fessenkoff was referring to the theoretical lens shape of the zodiacal dust cloud as opposed to what could be seen by any one individual from Earth; as Shough and van Utrecht state, the ecliptic itself – and hence the core of the zodiacal band – cannot be viewed as a complete ring any time from anywhere.

That said, however, my hunch involved a broad circular swathe of light composed on the northern side of only the *northernmost* boundary of the zodiacal band, as perhaps visible under the specified rare circumstances of atmospheric clarity; the northern portion of the ecliptic itself would obviously have passed below the northern horizon. I admit that I should have expressed myself more clearly in this regard. This also goes for the fact that I was not referring to the zodiacal band per se, but only to the obscure 'northern zodiacal light' when I wrote that the authors had taken no account of that "rare manifestation".

The authors are a tad disingenuous, however, when they take me to task for fingering midsummer as the ideal time of year for seeing the zodiacal band proper, rather than the northern glow with which I was concerned. It should also be evident that I was envisioning the northern glow to be on a different segment of the ring than Aquila and Boötes. And although my sources did indeed give 46° N as the required minimum latitude for observation, a lower value could be inferred from Campbell's claim that the phenomenon had also been sighted at Mount Hamilton, California (37°20′), as cited.

Be all that as it may, it is of the essence to remember that although the zodiacal light is concentrated in the ecliptic, it is not confined to it; technically, it even covers the whole sky <sup>1</sup> The shape of the zodiacal dust cloud is not exactly static and uniform, but structured and on longer timescales dynamic. Arms or patches

extend from the central band and originate in decaying streams of meteoroidal débris. 2

Significantly, between 1877 and 1885 the American astronomer Arthur Searle (1837-1920) came to the conclusion "that a faint band of light was visible at all seasons from Aquila to the Pleiades, its course being mostly, but not wholly, along the zodiac"<sup>3</sup> Searle cautiously allowed that this extension might be a faint branch of the Milky Way instead of a real zodiacal band. As for the constellation of Boötes with its prominent star Arcturus, Searle's team (p.170) perceived the "very distinct" zodiacal light of 14 November 1869 in "the form of a triangle, the base of which extended (approximately) from Arcturus to Spica (or rather between the points on the horizon where these stars rose)", with the apex "not far from Regulus".

For 8pm on 1 October 1901, Maxwell Hall, observing from Jamaica, noted: "Zodiacal light greatly diffused along the western horizon. The light extends between Arcturus and Venus up to the stars in the head of Scorpio. The band was not seen..." 4 Hall characterised the quality of starlight as 'bright' on that occasion. Again, the Rev William Ewart Glanville (1866-1933), reporting from New Market, Maryland (39°23′ N), saw the morning zodiacal light extend towards Arcturus between 28 November and 7 December 1932: "At 4:30 the space between Arcturus and Spica, then near the horizon, was well filled with the Light; at 5:30 the space was about half filled, Spica marking the sharply defined south bound-

Wrapping up, it is far from perplexing that zodiacal light should be seen as distant from the ecliptic as Aquila and Boötes. Given that Searle made his observations at the observatory of Harvard, Massachusetts, at almost the same latitude as Brunswick, Maine (42°30′ N) and Glanville was not far removed either,

ary." 5

it might still be rewarding for a modern astronomer to look into the possibility that the apparent zodiacal light extensions to Aquila and Arcturus and the strange light seen over Brunswick in 1907 were related. I remain struck by the coincidence that the Brunswick phenomenon should have been observed in the selfsame period that astronomers were discussing the rare observations of a 'northern zodiacal light', a topic I have not found mentioned in the literature before or after. If these points ring true, perhaps we can come round to the zodiacal angle again.

Marinus Anthony van der Sluijs Vancouver, Canada

### **NOTES**

- 1. For example, SJ Edberg & DH Levy, Observing Comets, Asteroids, Meteors, and the Zodiacal Light, CUP 1994, pp.151, 154.
- 2. For example, ME Bailey, SVM Clube & WM Napier, The Origin of Comets, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1990, pp.16, 18, 79, 167.
- 3. 'On Certain Zodiacal Phenomena', Science Observer, # 4. 37-38, 1882, p.6; cf. 'The Zodiacal Light; Discussed by Means of the Records of Harvard College Observatory', Annals of the Astronomical Observatory of Harvard College, v.19.2, 1893, pp.175-182, 189.
- 4. 'The Zodiacal Light', Bulletin of the Mount Weather Observatory, 6. 3, April-June 1913, p.73.
- 5. 'Zodiacal Light Notes', Popular Astronomy, 41.1, Jan 1933, p.66.

Editor's note: this correspondence is now closed

continued on page 74



Big shock on BBC1's Who Do You Think You Are?

## IT HAPPENED TO ME...

## First-hand accounts of strange experiences from FT readers

## Here's the paperwork

My story takes place sometime between 1994 and 1998, when I was in my early 20s, working as a Housing Officer for a large Housing Association in Hampshire. This involved managing social housing flats and the tenants who lived in them, often working on my own. I would be dealing with rent collection, debt and benefit advice, neighbourhood complaints and the like. I managed a large block of flats in Laburnum Road, Waterlooville, Hampshire, which included many bedsits. These seemed to house the most needy, dangerous and weird people you could imagine. I particularly remember Jock. who always wore a sun hat with a clothes peg pegged on the top covered with dense and nonsensical writing (in felt tip) in concentric circles all over the brim. When he died and I cleared his flat, I found that almost every surface, including kitchen cupboards, every wall and even his headboard was wallpapered with 'page 3' girly pictures with the eyes cut out and various, rather personal, comments attached to each picture. I also remember another tenant who had created a 'safe room' inside his bedsit entirely enclosing him in a 6ft x 6ft floor-to-ceiling box with a locked door and even chains around it with just a chair and a radio inside.

One day my boss told me to deal with a flat of a tenant I had never met. He was a recluse whose rent was always paid by his benefits and had never been a problem to anyone. The neighbours had complained to Environmental Health about the smell, and when the police broke in they found the unfortunate man dead in his bed where he had lain undiscovered for at least six weeks. When I was notified of the situation the body had been removed, Environmental Health had fumigated and the flat was ready to be prepared for reletting, which was my job.

The first task was to make an inventory, check there was no



## "Please, for God's sake find this paperwork and let's go!"

next of kin recorded on file and if there were, to ask them to clear the flat; if not, I had to arrange a contractor to do it. Luckily for me, the police had already found a nephew who lived some distance away. I contacted him and discovered that he had no intention of helping to clear the flat and probably didn't have the means to pay the bill if I got someone else to do it. However, he had a simple request: his uncle had been something of a war hero and he wanted to retrieve his medals as a keepsake. We arranged to meet at the flat while I made an inventory for the flat clearance company.

Millions of dead flies filled the flat, creating 'snow drifts' on the windowsill and a crunching noise as we walked about. The deathbed had the sheets pulled back and a stained imprint of a human body. There was even a stain on the headboard. Every surface of the bedsit was covered with dead flies, as well as paperwork and documents dating back decades. Torn curtains kept out

the light. Rubbish littered the floor and a sofa had a perfectly laid out set of women's clothes including stockings and high heels presented as if a semi-clad woman had sat there and then just vanished. Strange porcelain dolls sat on the sideboard staring at me.

The nephew seemed unfazed and quickly discovered the medals he was after. However, he also wanted some paperwork that went with them – the man's service record, I assumed. I just wanted to leave as quickly as possible and wasn't interested in what he wanted. He told me that this paperwork was most likely kept in the kitchen, in the bottom of a cupboard under the boiler, situated at floor level. We went in together. The kitchen was surprisingly tidy and uncluttered with a dirty but otherwise empty lino floor and nothing else apart from an overflowing bin. I looked in the cupboard; there were indeed a few bits of paper, but nothing related to the medals.

I got up and the nephew then had a look. He rifled through every bit of paper without taking anything out, but also drew a blank. Slightly perturbed, the nephew went back into the living room and started looking through all the detritus there. Whilst he did that, and keen to stay out of the horrific sitting

room, I searched the kitchen again, looking in other drawers and cupboards. I checked the first cupboard again as well – but still drew a blank.

By now I was fed up and a little spooked, so I walked into the sitting room and told the nephew his time was up. Begrudgingly, he agreed but as we prepared to leave he suggested we check the kitchen one more time. I remember thinking to myself, "Please, for God's sake find this paperwork and let's go!"

We both walked into the kitchen and the first thing we saw was a roll of paperwork in the middle of the floor held together with an elastic band. There had been nothing there when I had left a few moments before. I picked it up and unrolled it. It was indeed the paperwork relating to the man's service career and particularly the medals. I showed it to the nephew and he confirmed that it was what he had been looking for.

The realisation that this paperwork had suddenly appeared dawned on both of us at the same time. We looked at the paperwork, looked at each other, and both said "That was weird" at the same time. Then with a shrug the nephew left, and I followed on quickly behind. I never went back. The flat was cleared, re-let and a new tenant quickly

moved in.

Did the dead tenant want to help us, or did he just want us to go and leave him in peace? Was the nephew a messenger perhaps there to help guide the dead man to a peaceful afterlife? Who knows?

**Dominic Clarke** 

Blackmoor, Hampshire

## Chicken portent

I had a strange experience on the cusp of the Covid-19 'Lockdown' in the UK, It was Monday, 16 March. My husband had been laid up in bed for a week suffering from a virus that may or may not have been the infamous one, and I had been at work. At about 5pm he rang me to say that he had watched the Government press conference and that I now needed to 'self-isolate' as I was in the household of someone who was unwell, so I called off the remainder of my work and set off for home.

On the roads there was a tangible sense of anxiety that went beyond the usual Kentish rush-hour angst. People pulled out of junctions a couple of feet from me with a dazed look on their faces, ignoring give-way lines. Our stretch of the M20, temporarily restricted to 50mph, was suddenly back to 70-80mph with most drivers, as they flew past, ignoring the cameras.

I got home, somewhat relieved, and looked in the side mirror as I backed onto the driveway alongside my husband's car. As I did, I was astounded to see quite clearly in the mirror, two large, pale, bald chicken legs, each with three long toes, edging furtively into his nearside wheel-well. The legs stepped very deliberately backwards, as if they were in the process of emerging and had seen me and been caught out. I had the peculiar feeling that I shouldn't be witnessing this event and my senses were telling me "This isn't right!" I stared in disbelief as they went out of sight. If there was a bird attached to them it must have been about the size of a large domestic chicken. We live in a suburban area and I have never seen chickens being kept anywhere near us.

I finished backing onto the drive and immediately got out and knelt down beside my husband's car to inspect. There was nothing there, but a piece of trim on that side was hanging loose. Still, no bird was visible under or behind the car and our drive is very open, so there's nowhere it could have quickly hidden. There was no evidence of feathers or excrement, bits of straw or other debris that might suggest a nest. An inspection under the bonnet with a torch yielded nothing neither did turning the wheels or driving the car around the block. There wasn't even room under the wheel arch for a bird of that size to roost.

I still refer to this creature as 'Chicken Legs' in a jokey way, but I am convinced I saw something weird and out of place that day and I wonder if it could have been some form of nature spirit or liminal entity, stirred up by the sense of panic and uncertainty in the air. It reminded me a little of the crisis apparitions that visited people during wartime or other times of great stress.

Have any other readers had any similar pandemic-era sightings?

**J Rosina Harlow** Ditton, Kent

## Barney's drink habit

Recently, my wife and I went for a short break to a small village in North Wales. It was quite isolated, so when we were in the local chip shop and heard a Derbyshire accent (we are also from Derbyshire) we were surprised. We asked the man where he was from and were amazed

that not only was he on a short break in the village like us, but also came from only about 10 miles from where we lived. While we were chatting, another man came in, and he also had a Derbyshire accent. He had moved to the village 20 years ago, but originally lived in the village next to ours in Derbyshire.

This reminded me of another coincidence that happened to me some years ago. I went to college in Merseyside and had a friend called Barney. We lost touch after leaving college. About 10 years later I was in my local pub, reminiscing with friends about old times. I mentioned Barney and that I hadn't seen him since college, when Barney walked in. The pub wasn't his local and he had never been in before. He said he was passing and just decided to come in for a drink. Five years later I was the manager of a pub, once again in North Wales. This was very much a pub for locals, and when once again I was reminiscing about old times, who should walk in but Barney? I was astounded. He had no knowledge of the area and was on his way to meet some friends for a holiday. Once again, he just had the urge to call in for a drink.

**William Jones** By email

## Obliging spook

In 1998 (or thereabouts) I was living with my then-girlfriend in a flat in North Yorkshire that

she had bought at a bargain price. The flat had a basement that she rented out to a friend of ours. One night we awoke to the sound of slow deliberate footsteps crossing our yard before crunching to a stop outside our bedroom window. We didn't look outside. I don't recall the footsteps walking away again. We didn't think much of it at the time, but now I wonder if this was connected with later events.

When we had been there a few nights, we both started to hear an unmistakable rustling sound around the bed. This happened a number of times, but nothing could be seen when the light was turned on. I assumed it was mice, and mentioned it to our flatmate. He pointed out that we had two cats, so mice seemed unlikely. He then gave me a bit of a look and said, "Yes, I think there's something in this flat" – and told me that he had been reading downstairs one evening when the door had been slowly pushed open. Expecting to see either me or my girlfriend (or one of the cats), he had waited.

No one came into the room. The door in question was in any case very difficult to move, because of the thick carpet in the basement. It certainly wouldn't drift open on its own. He added that the basement window had been closed at the time. I asked him if he had been scared, which made him grin. "Whatever it is, it's quite weak," he

> explained confidently. "I told it to get lost, and I haven't heard anything since. It must have gone upstairs."

The next time I heard the rustling sound, I thought I would test out our flatmate's theory. In my mind I started thinking over and over, "It's time for you to be on your way. Off you go." There was no further disturbance after that.

**Matt Stanhope** Pocklington, *Yorkshire* 



## **LETTERS**

## **Bottle-brush tail**

I have always been irritated by the ridiculous sketch of Gef [FT391:46], produced by Voirrey Irving in 1931; I mean, how could such a ridiculous creature be a mongoose? However, in search of something to read in the lockdown, I opened The Jungle Book (1894) by Rudyard Kipling and read for the first time in 60 years about Rikki-Tikki-Tavi, who is of course a talking (to other animals) mongoose [see **FT353:34-39**].

To my immense surprise I came across the following: "He was rather like a little cat in his fur and his tail, but quite like a weasel in his head and his habits... He could fluff up his tail till it looked like a bottle-brush" [my emphasis]. And we see the cat's whiskers and long eyelashes, and the bottle-brush tail! Where else is a 13-year-old girl in a remote part of the Isle of Man in 1931 going to hear about a mongoose and get an idea of what it looks like but the immensely popular children's book, Kipling's *The Jungle Book*? Though I am not sure she had ever seen a bottle-brush, which nowadays at least are cylindrical.

Roger J Morgan By email

Christopher Josiffe responds: The artist's impression of Gef wasn't drawn by Voirrey Irving; Harry Price commissioned artist George Scott to produce the sketch based on descriptions supplied by the Irving family. Gef was reportedly unhappy with the finished result, declaring: "That ain't me! Looks more like a llama!" (or, perhaps, a lama).

But Mr Morgan makes significant points regarding the Kipling quotation. "He was rather like a cat..." – some of the alleged photos of Gef from the SPR archive do resemble a small cat, and Gef was supposed to have shape-shifted into a cat on two occasions. Likewise, the Scott sketch with its bushy, squirrel-like tail does tally with Kipling's description of Rikki-Tikk-Tavi's ability to "fluff up his tail like a bottle-brush". Such a tail is an unusual feature for a mongoose, but bear in mind Gef had initially described himself as a weasel, or "a ghost in the form of a weasel". His selfidentification as a mongoose appears to have been prompted by a February 1932 letter to the Isle of Man Weekly Times, in which it was suggested that the Irvings' mystery guest

might be a mongoose, on the basis that several of these fierce, rabbit-hunting creatures had been acquired by a nearby farm, Eary Cushlin, some 20 years earlier.

Journalists and investigators visiting the Irvings' farmhouse didn't see a copy of The Jungle Book on their bookshelf. Their poverty meant they owned very few books. However, while I was unable to prove that Voirrey's school library held a copy or copies of The Jungle Book, it does seem likely that she would have come across this popular and bestselling work during her childhood. Indeed, its theme of fostered or abandoned children detected by some critics (recalling Kipling's own childhood feelings of abandonment) may well have held some appeal for the lonely Voirrey Irving.

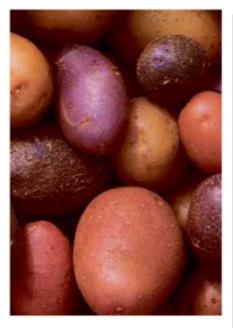
## Scams, UFOs, potatoes

Although I find it difficult to find anything funny in even the most ridiculous reactions to Covid-19, I do think there's a certain irony in the fact that Lourdes has closed its healing pools [**FT**391:4].

In 'Fairies, Folklore and Forteana' [FT392:31], the "infected money" scam, where you leave your money on the doorstep, along with your bank details, and the government refunds it electronically (not), reminds me of a similar scam in the USA some years ago. When customers went to deposit money in a night deposit box outside a bank, they were met by a security guard who informed them the box was out of order, and they should deposit the money in the bag he was holding. Surprise, surprise, he wasn't a real security guard! Sometimes the simplest scams seem the most effective.

Peter Brookesmith's 'Articles of Faith' [FT392:32] indirectly brings up an important point. Prompted by the northern lady's misguided statement, I have to say that I believe it is impossible to be a UFO 'expert' (as opposed to a ufologist), as some people claim, as by definition a UFO is unidentified. If you have expertise in particular areas, you may be able to explain many UFO cases, but you can't be an expert in the unexplained ones. I also think the term 'UFO' is often used in place of 'flying saucer', as when people ask if you believe in UFOs. Of course I believe in seeing something I can't necessarily identify.

Regarding 'Belgian Blame Game' [FT392:32], I think Belgium has been subjected to unjustified negative press over the years. Older readers may recall Monty Python's sketch where they run a competition to find a new name to call Belgians, and the winner is "Let's not call



them anything; let's just ignore them." From my experience, it is a lovely country, with great beers, attractive cities, friendly people who all seem to understand English, and great beers. As far as I am concerned, they can see as many UFOs as they like.

I found 'Mulch, Myth and Magic' [FT392:52-55] an amusing read, which illustrated an

interesting point. There has been much said on the subject of stone circles, which appear to have calendrical properties, being used by the ancient farming community to tell them when to plant or harvest. I have always thought the farmers would have been far more savvy than that, and would have used the behaviour of other plants as a reference, their equivalent of the dandelions flowering on the Boiler Road. The article also mentions some of the folk beliefs about potatoes. It's worth remembering that they have been in this country for only a little over 400 years. It would be interesting to know how many beliefs grew from the fact that this was a brand new vegetable in relatively recent history. It would also be worth comparing these beliefs with those of South America, where it has been cultivated for millennia.

**Dave Miles** By email

## PECULIAR POSTCARDS

JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past celebrates William Bell, who gave up a life of labour to live in the forest with his two dogs.



## 6. THE HERMIT OF HAINAULT FOREST

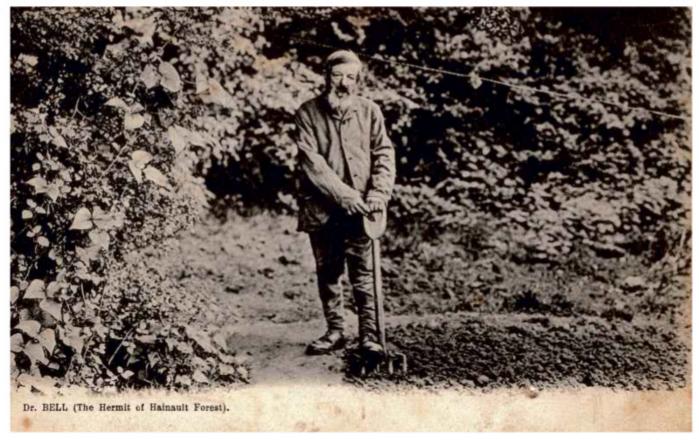
We live in the meadows And we toil in the soil; Far away from your cities and glooms;

More cheery are we, Though in rags we may be, Than the pale faces are in your rooms

These were the defiant poetic exhortations of William Bell, alias 'Old Dido', the Hermit of Hainault Forest, when he stood before the Stratford magistrates in late 1903, charged with keeping two unlicensed dogs.

The antecedents of this remarkable hermit are worthy of a short discourse. He claimed to have been born in Bethnal Green in 1831, the youngest of eight children and orphaned at the age of 11. He worked as a fishmonger, and as a labourer in the East India Docks, but did not like it very much. He had always been fond of nature, and in the 1870s he gave up work altogether and settled as a hermit in Hainault Forest. He hunted hedgehogs, rabbits and wild birds, killed snakes, and picked blackberries to sell at the market. His home was a primitive hut he had erected himself, but it was surrounded by a nicely cultivated little garden, in which he grew potatoes, cabbages and beans. He had a charcoal fire in a bucket as his only means of cooking and keeping warm. How the hermit survived the sometimes freezing-cold winters is difficult to imagine; he must have been exceptionally hardy.

Bell was fond of herbal cures, making ointments to treat lumbago, sciatica and indigestion, and treating children for colds and whooping cough. Proud of his medical knowledge, he called himself Dr Bell, although the locals



used to refer to him as 'Dido Jones' or 'Old Dido'. He was well known locally as a quack doctor. It is remarkable that the local peasants trusted the minuscule medical knowledge of this unprepossessing, bushybearded old man, who never washed or had a bath, but he seems to have abided by the quack's golden rule, namely never to treat any person who was seriously ill; anyway, his harmless nostrums did not have the potency to kill off any of his patients. The hermit's second career was that of a market trader: he sold birds, berries. and tea he had made from dried hawthorn and blackthorn leaves. The authorities tolerated him, since he did no harm and minded his own business.

In December 1903, Bell was prosecuted before the magistrate at Stratford for keeping two unlicensed dogs. The hermit showed a postcard where he was depicted near his

hermitage, and recited another of his doggerel poems:

I have been squatter at Hainault Forest for many years;

'Tis well known my work was there more or less every day, For fifteen years I never asked anyone for pay.

I kept hedges up in repair, So cattle could not get out as was a-straying there.

I thought in my mind, Sir, I was a very good forest keeper, And keepers and shepherds, I've heard, can keep dogs without pay,

And I never let mine go astray. The hermit looked as scruffy, dirty and bedraggled as ever. When asked what kind of doctor he was, he replied: "I am Doctor Bell, and a bit of a doctor of divinity as well!" He needed his dogs as protection, he explained, and had never thought of paying the dog tax. He was fined 10 shillings plus four shillings costs, but said he had no money. The bonhomous magistrate said he could be

trusted over the Christmas period, and the hermit politely thanked him for this courtesy, promising to pay his fine as soon as he was solvent once more.

Bell's appearance before the magistrates meant that the authorities now knew all about the Hermit of Hainault Forest. Since it was argued that he had damaged the trees with his digging, there was an injunction to prevent him from erecting a hut or tent in the forest. In May 1904, he was given three weeks to move, but decided to stay in his hermitage until the last; as a result, a troop of bailiffs came to destroy his hut and garden. The 73-year-old Bell left his hermitage for the last time, accompanied by his dogs, Jack and Snyder. He told a journalist that he had managed to get lodgings nearby, allowing him to spend the days in the forest with his dogs, although he would now have the luxury of a warm bed to sleep in at night.

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## WHY FORTEAN?



**FORTEAN TIMES** is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of* the Damned (1919), New Lands (1923), Lo! (1931), and Wild Talents (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-asorganism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. Fortean Times keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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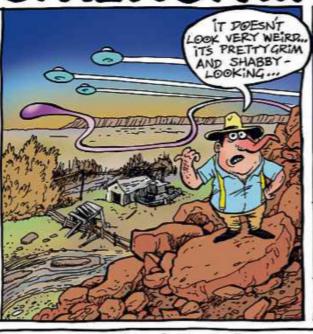
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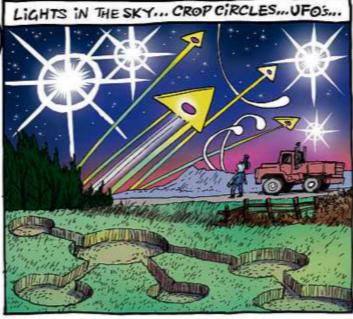
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IN THE LATE
1990'S THERE
WAS A LOT
OF UFO AND
OTHER STRANGE
ACTIVITY
AROUND A
512 ACRE
RANCH IN UTAH,
THAT BECAME
KNOWN AS THE
SKINWALKER
RANCH!
YOU MIGHT
REMEMBER IT...

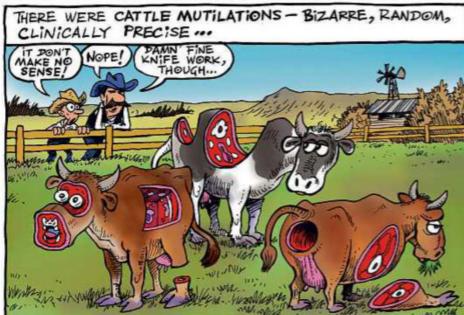




THERE HAD BEEN
REPORTS OF UPO
ACTIVITY FOR AT
LEAST 50 YEARS...

YOU CAN'T THROW A ROCK
IN UTAH WITHOUT HITTIN'
AN ABDUCTEE!

TRENT HARRISLOCAL FILMMAKER



ORBS OF
LIGHT WERE
SEEN
PLUNGING
INTO THE
RESERVOIR
BOTTLE
HOLLOW,
THEN
SHOOTING
OUT AS
GLOWING,
BELT-LIKE
LIGHTS...



THEN, ONE NIGHT, THE RANCHER, TERRY SHERMAN, WAS FACED WITH A GIANT WOLF THAT GRABBED A CALF AND RAN OFF. TERRY SHOT IT SEVERAL TIMES, BUT THE BULLETS BOUNCED OFF THE BEAST.



SHERMAN HAD HAD ENOUGH, AND SOLD THE RANCH - TO ONE ROBERT BIGELOW, A LAS VEGAS REAL ESTATE MAGNATE, AND A UFO NUT!



BIGELOW SET UP THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR DISCOVERY SCIENCE TO MONITOR THE STRANGE EVENTS ... AND THEN, IN 1997, A SCIENTIST WORKING ON THE RANCH SAW A LARGE HUMANOID CRITTER LOUNGING IN A TREE, WATCHING HIM CLOSELY ...



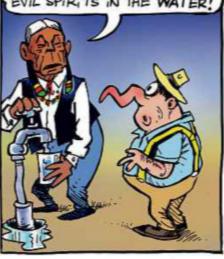
HE FIRED HIS RIFLE, AND THE CREATURE LEGGED IT, LEAVING A LARGE PRINT IN THE SNOW!

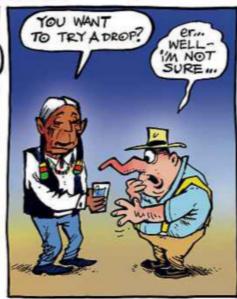


THE LOCAL NATIVE AMERICAN PEOPLE -THE UTE TRIBE - KNEW WHAT IT WAS -A SKINWALKER-A SHAPE-SHIFTING WITCH!



SURE, MAN!
OUR OLD STORIES SAY THE
LOCAL SPRINGS AND
WATERWAYS ARE RESERVOIRS
OF NEGATIVE POWERS!
EVIL SPIRITS IN THE WATER!





(BUT WE KNOW HE WILL ...)

# COMING NEXT MONTH



## **ALIEN AUTOPSY**

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# FORTEAN TIMES 395

ON SALE 16 JULY 2020

## STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A man who was taking his rooster to a cockfight in India was killed when the bird slashed his throat with a blade attached to its claw. Saripalli Chanavenkateshwaram Rao, 50, was declared dead on arrival at a hospital in the southern state of Andra Pradesh. The cockfight went ahead, even though the sport was outlawed in India in the Sixties. *Times, 24 Jan 2020*.

Former gas fitter James Pettit, 63, was found dead under a mountain of rubbish at his home in Erdington, Birmingham. Police broke into the property after being alerted by neighbours, but Mr Pettit's body could not be recovered until council workers had taken away three flatbed trucks of material. A narrow staircase behind the front door was seen to be overflowing with papers, bottles and rubbish. Two years prior to his death, Mr Pettit had tripped on the cluttered stairs and fallen through a glass door. "It was ten times worse upstairs," said one worker. "The police said it was too dangerous and unsafe to move the body". Mr Pettit had lived at the property for around 40 years. Neighbours recalled seeing the hoarder "always well turned out" and said he had been seen getting into a Bentley a few weeks before his death. "The strange thing is that he always appeared well dressed," said one neighbour. "You'd see him walking down the street with his dry cleaning. That always struck me – that he would get his clothes dry cleaned and then go back into that flat. I went in 25 years ago and there was no room to move." Another resident remarked: "He was a very quiet man but he had a good job. He would get taxis everywhere." D.Express, 18 Jan 2020.

Mother of two Ekaterina Nikiforova, 27, of Krasnoyarsk, Siberia, was killed by Alexey Yastrebov, 35, who slashed her throat and then cooked her lungs and heart in his kitchen. He called his landlady to tell her what he had done, and when medics arrived at the flat he said: "There's a heart cooking on the stove". Under questioning, Yastrebov told police: "I told her I would eat her heart. So I did." *D.Mirror, 23 Mar 2018.* 

Odessa Carey, 36, bludgeoned her identically named mother with a mallet and cut off her head with scissors. She then visited a friend's allotment where she took

the head out of a carrier bag and kissed it. (The friend's reaction is not recorded.) The body of Odessa Carey Senior, 79, was found at her house in Ashington, Northumberland. Her head was found under the sink at another house where her daughter was hiding in the loft. She was found unfit to stand trial. Sun, 6+12 Mar 2020.

In late 2019, engineer Adam Ashby, 31, fell to his death from a washing line pole while trying to entertain friends and relatives. He had climbed up the 10ft (3m) pole, but lost his balance and fell onto the concrete patio head first. Among the family gathering was his fiancée Abbie Williams, 27; the couple were due to get married in January. "He fell right in front of me, my friends, and my family," Ms Williams told the coroner. "He was just trying to make people laugh." A verdict of accidental death was recorded. Sun, 2 Dec 2019.

A man shot five people dead for talking too loudly outside his house. The shooting occurred in the village of Yelatma in the Ryazan region, about 200km (124m) south-east of Moscow. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the area was under lockdown. An argument broke out after the man complained to the four men and one woman from his balcony, after which, at around 10pm, he starting shooting at them with a hunting rifle. All five died of their injuries at the scene. *BBC News*, 5 *Apr 2020*.

Two sisters in different countries both died from brain hæmorrhages within 24 hours of each other. Amanda Williams, 54, collapsed as she prepared to travel from her Leicester home to Ingolstadt, Germany, to be with her sister Jacqueline, 57, who was gravely ill with a bleed on the brain. An ambulance took Amanda to hospital but she died there on 7 September, a day after her sister had passed away in Germany. The family held a joint funeral for the pair in Leicester. *Metro, 19 Sep 2019.* 

By late March, nearly 300 people had died and more than 1,000 made ill across Iran after drinking methanol, believing it could cure coronavirus. Drinking alcohol, of course, is banned in the Islamic Republic and those who do have to rely on bootleggers. *D.Telegraph, 28 Mar 2020*.



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OVER 25KGS...

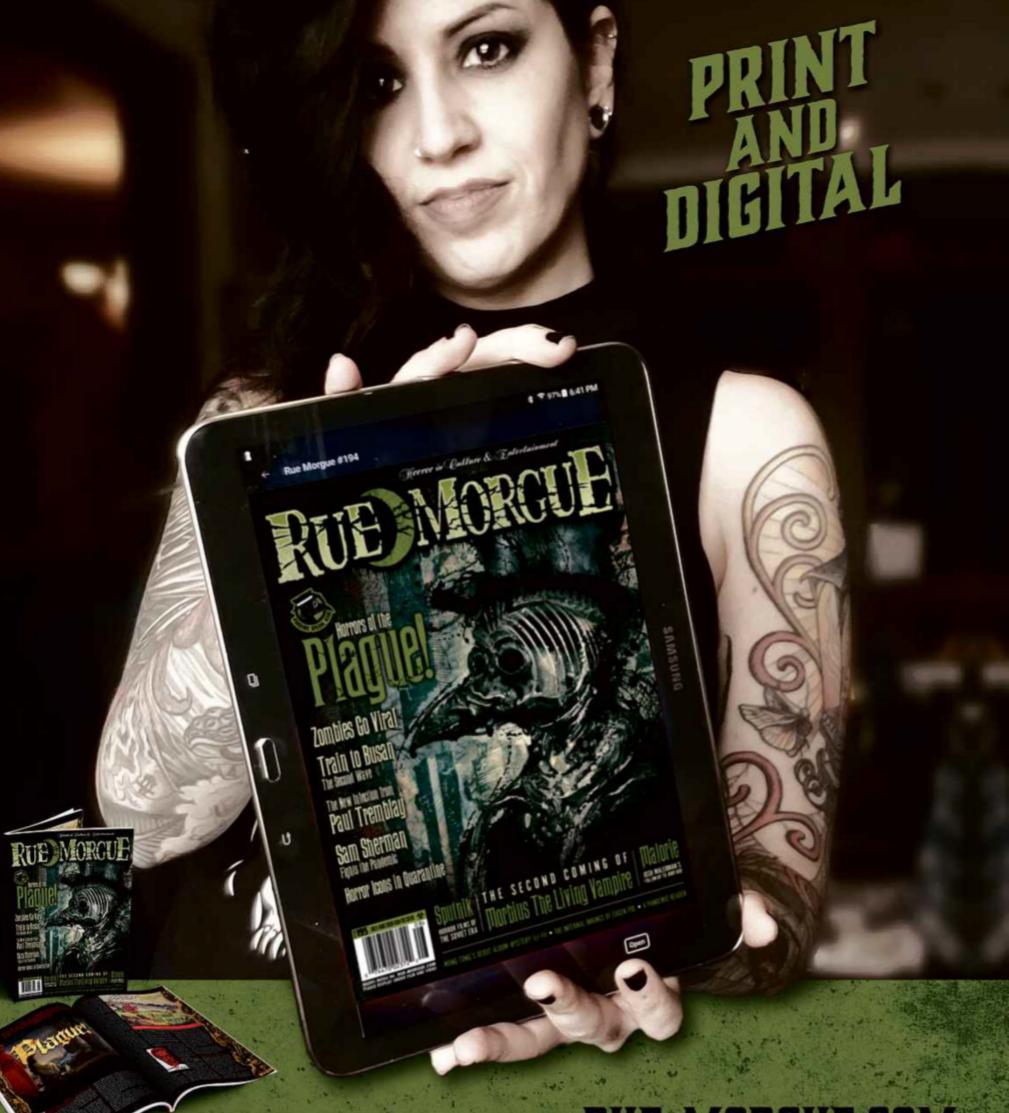
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